OSPREY COMBAT AIRCRAFT • 91

He 111 KAMPFGESCHWADER IN THE WEST

John Weal

Osprey's primary Luftwaffe author/artist, JOHN WEAL has written and/or illustrated more than 30 titles in the Aircraft of the Aces, Combat Aircraft and Aviation Elite Units series since 1994. Possessing one of the largest private collections of original German-language literature from World War 2, his research is firmly based on this huge archive. Fluent in German, Weal has also spent much time establishing contact with ex-members of the Luftwaffe, from General Staff Officers of the RLM to frontline aircrew. He has often used these private sources to gain access to further archival material, including complete Luftwaffe orders of battle for the various fighting fronts and individual combat reports. A freelance airbrush artist since the days of the monthly *RAF Flying Review*, and its various successors, Weal also helps his German wife run a small technical translation and interpreting agency.

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SERIES EDITOR: TONY HOLMES

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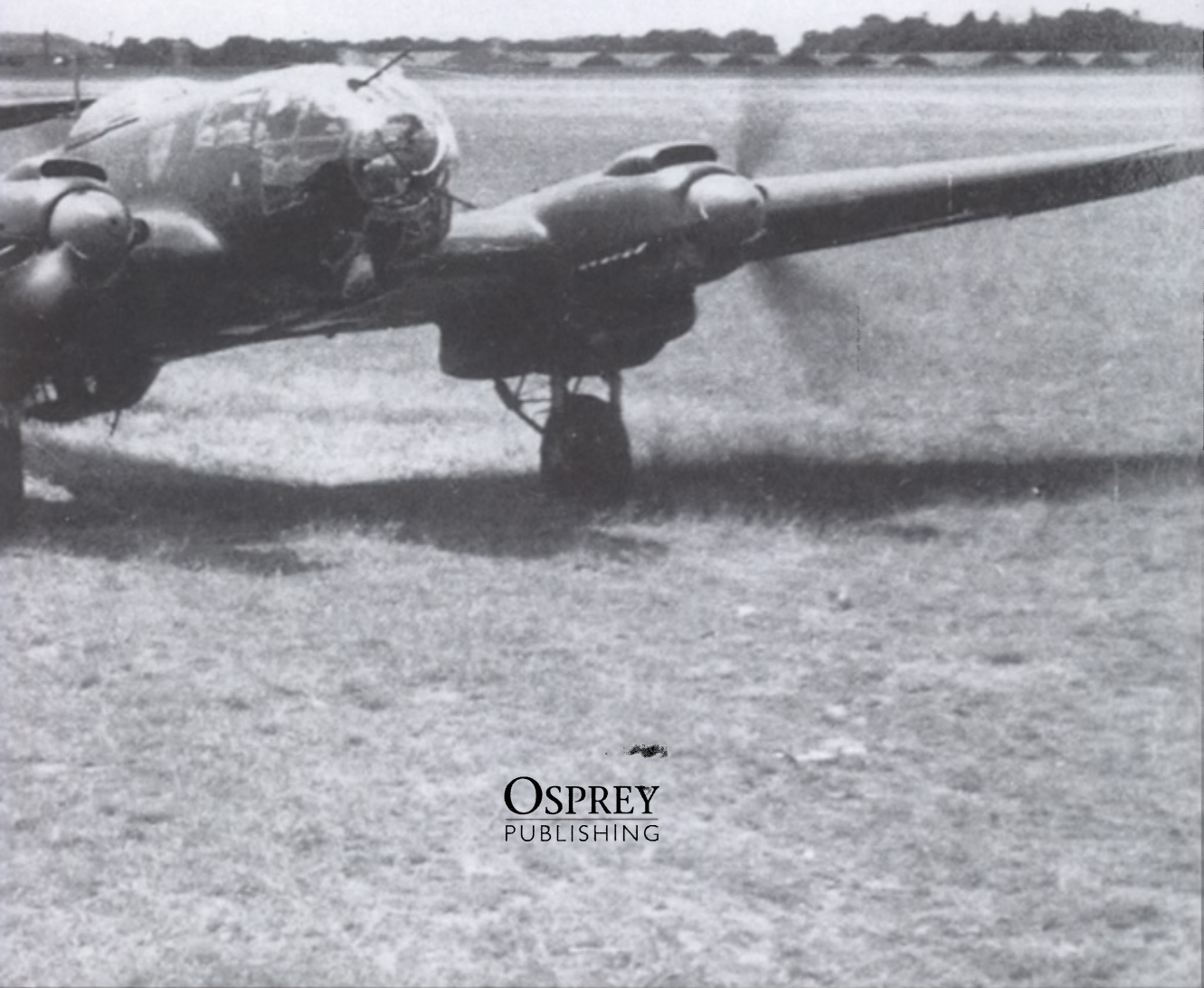

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Front cover
The highest ranking Luftwaffe casualty of 14 August 1940 was Oberst Alois Stoeckl, the *Geschwaderkommodore* of *Kampfgeschwader* (KG) 55. On that date the famous 'Griffon' *Geschwader* despatched nine small formations of He 111s to carry out harassing raids against various targets in northern England.

The 44-year-old Stoeckl himself led the group that had been briefed to attack Liverpool. Taking off from Villacoublay in the late afternoon, the bombers set course for their objective. Before reaching it, however, Stoeckl's 'G1+AA' developed engine trouble. Forced to abort the mission, the *Kommodore* turned back, accompanied by the two machines of his *Stabskette*.

Flying south across Hampshire in heavy cloud, Stoeckl searched for a target of opportunity. He spotted an airfield – whether Middle Wallop or Upavon is no longer clear – but while lining up for the bombing run, his aircraft was jumped by a pair of Spitfire Is from No 609 Sqn. The pilot of one of the fighters, future ace Plt Off D M Crook, claimed a Heinkel as 'certainly damaged, but nothing more'. In fact Stoeckl's machine had been mortally wounded, and while trying to make an emergency landing it crashed and exploded in the Royal Navy Armament Depot at Dean Hill, east of Salisbury. Oberst Alois Stoeckl and two other members of his crew perished in the crash (*Cover artwork by Mark Postlethwaite*)

Title pages
Two He 111Ps of KG 55 taxi out across the grass at Villacoublay ready for take-off during July 1940. Note the additional machine gun protruding from the upper nose glazing of the leading machine

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ENTRY INTO SERVICE

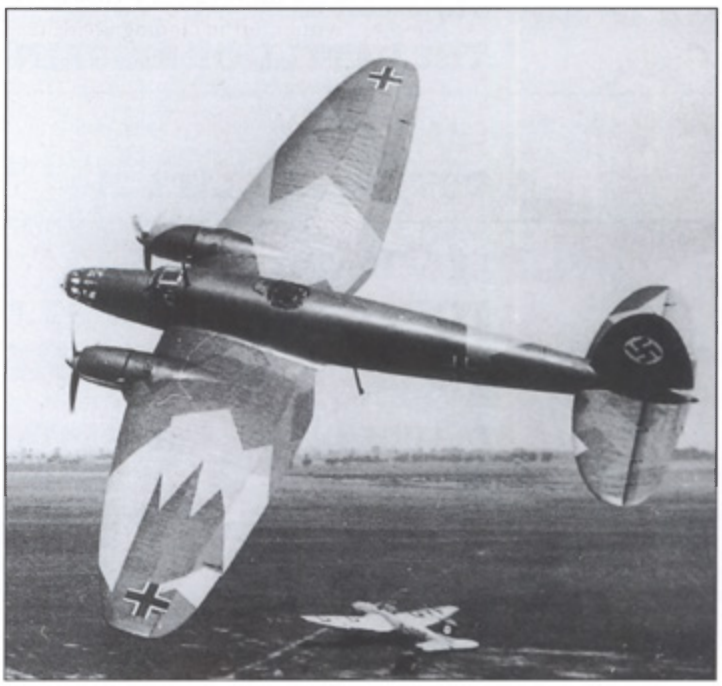
Forming the backbone of the Luftwaffe's bomber arm during both the *Blitzkrieg* in the West and the Battle of Britain, the He 111 has quite rightly been described by one noted aviation historian as 'one of the most outstanding warplanes of the mid-1930s'.

Like its two contemporaries, the Dornier Do 17 and Junkers Ju 86 (all three types would make their maiden flights within weeks of each other in the late autumn/winter of 1934/35), the He 111 stemmed from specifications secretly drawn up by the German Army's Ordnance Bureau in July 1932. This was in the days before Adolf Hitler's rise to power, and the then ruling Weimar Government was still at pains to pay at least lip service to the restrictions imposed on German rearmament by the Treaty of Versailles.

Consequently, the Dornier, Heinkel and Junkers companies were each required to produce a design for a high-speed, twin-engined all-metal monoplane that would be presented to the outside world as a prestigious new passenger/mailplane for Germany's national airline, Deutsche Lufthansa, but which, at the same time, could also be developed as a modern and state-of-the-art medium bomber for the country's fledgling – and as yet still clandestine – military air arm, the Reichsluftwaffe.

Although it was the machines' civilian roles that subsequently dominated their coverage in both the popular and the specialist aviation press of the mid to late 1930s, behind the scenes it was always military considerations that took precedence in any conflicting design and development decisions. In order to be able to produce parallel civil and military variants, all three manufacturers built at least one or more prototypes of each. In Heinkel's case this resulted in four initial prototypes, the first and third (He 111s V1 and V3) being the military models and the second and fourth (V2 and V4) representing the civil versions.

The He 111 V1 made its first flight from the company's new Rostock-Marienehe factory on



'One of the most outstanding warplanes of the mid-1930s'. Seen banking low over the Heinkel works' airfield at Rostock-Marienehe, this He 111D displays its striking three-tone uppersurface camouflage scheme and shows to advantage the early variants' elegantly curved wing leading edges

24 February 1935. At the controls was the firm's equally new chief test pilot, Gerhard Nitschke, a graduate of the Reichswehr's covert flying school at Lipezk in the Soviet Union. Nitschke lifted off smoothly enough from the semi-completed runway, but company head Professor Ernst Heinkel was concerned about the length of runway available for bringing the high-speed machine back down again. If Nitschke had any misgivings, Heinkel stressed that he should make for the experimental station at Rechlin, less than 90 km away to the southeast, and land there.

The professor need not have worried. After circling the field a few times, Nitschke touched down at Marienehe as effortlessly as he had taken off, declaring himself to be 'extremely pleased' with the aircraft's handling characteristics and very excited about its future prospects.

Nitschke was to be proven right. The two military prototypes would indeed spawn one of the best known, most easily recognisable and numerous Luftwaffe bombers of the early war years. But before detailing its operational history as a warplane, brief mention should perhaps be made of the Heinkel's much more limited civilian career.

The initial civil prototype, the He 111 V2, first took to the air in March 1935. It was followed by the V4 before the year was out. The latter was the forerunner of a small series of six He 111C airliners, and by the beginning of 1936 the German state carrier, Deutsche Lufthansa, had taken delivery of both prototypes and the first He 111C. The airline decided to name its He 111s after large towns or cities, and the three machines became *Rostock*, *Dresden* and *Nürnberg*, respectively. The trio began flying domestic scheduled services in April 1936, serving the Berlin-Cologne and Berlin-Munich routes as part of the new summer timetable. The five remaining He 111Cs were all delivered during the course of 1936.

The following year Lufthansa was to lose a quarter of its small fleet of eight twin-engined Heinkels. The two casualties were reportedly both written off in landing accidents. One was *Koln*, the third He 111C of the series. The other was the original civil prototype. By this time, in addition to flying regular passenger services within Germany, the He 111 V2 *Rostock* was also operating on a number of carefully selected international airmail routes (and taking the opportunity to indulge in some secret photographic reconnaissance work while so doing). It was during one such flight to West Africa in the spring of 1937 that *Rostock* came to grief while landing at Bathurst in The Gambia.

The two losses were quickly made good by the delivery of the first two He 111Gs, an improved airliner variant. These were followed during the first half of 1938 by two more G-models which, unlike all previous machines, were powered by radial engines. The second of this latter pair of aircraft was christened *Dresden* to commemorate the recently retired He 111 V4.

During the last year of peace in Europe the Lufthansa fleet thus included a total of nine He 111s in all. They operated on some dozen routes, serving not only destinations within the Greater German Reich, but also such foreign cities as Amsterdam, Lisbon, Warsaw and Zurich. And as a partner in Deruluft (the amalgamated German-Russian airline), Lufthansa machines also enjoyed rare access to Soviet airspace. The routes they flew – such as that from Berlin, via Königsberg and Minsk, to

The two He 111 airliners lost in 1937 are pictured together at Berlin-Tempelhof. On the apron is He 111 V2 D-ALIX/*Rostock*, while flying overhead is He 111C-03 D-AXAV/*Köln*

Moscow – were closely monitored by the suspicious Russians. But there were frequent instances of German pilots inadvertently 'straying off course'. Profuse apologies would always follow – a small enough price to pay for the aerial-reconnaissance photographs captured by the cameras hidden in the bellies of the Heinkel airliners!

Lufthansa did not retain its He 111s for long after the outbreak of war in September 1939, as they were quickly requisitioned by the military. Most then served in the courier role, although at least four examples (three He 111Cs and one G) ended up as multi-engined or blind-flying trainers. All four would subsequently be lost or written off, the first on 22 October 1940 and the last on 20 November 1943.

Heinkel produced nine more He 111Gs before the war, none of which was destined for Lufthansa service. Five went straight to the Luftwaffe as eight to ten-seat VIP transports and the final four were exported to Turkey, together with a batch of 24 He 111F bombers. The He 111's relatively short-lived career in civilian livery had been brought to a close by the advent of war. But what of its parallel development as a bomber?

Despite chief test pilot Nitschke's initial enthusiasm, the first of the bomber variants, the He 111A, proved a huge disappointment. With a full military load, it displayed none of the 'extremely pleasant handling characteristics' of its immediate predecessor, the He 111 V3 prototype. It was instead found to be underpowered, unresponsive and sluggish.

So much so, in fact, that in the summer of 1936 the initial order for 15 machines was cut back to just seven. And even these the Luftwaffe refused to accept.

Heinkel, however, already had a willing buyer waiting in the wings. Having sought and obtained an export licence for six of the He 111As, the machines were stripped of their Luftwaffe equipment, dismantled, crated and shipped from Rostock to Canton, in China, for service with Gen Chiang Kai-shek's Central Government. The Chinese were anxious to buy any remotely modern aircraft to help them in their fight against the invading Japanese. Modern the Heinkels undoubtedly were, but their shortcomings immediately became apparent to their new owners.

On one of their earliest missions five He 111As were sent out on a raid with a mixed force of American Boeing 281 and Martin 139 bombers. The formation was attacked by Japanese fighters and three of the Heinkels were shot down. The remaining trio continued to serve with the Chinese Air Force's 19th Bomber Squadron for the next few months, during which time a fourth machine was lost on a practice flight and a fifth brought down in error by a Chinese fighter. The sole survivor was then written off by an inexperienced pilot.

Meanwhile, back in Germany, Heinkel, undeterred by the RLM's rejection of the He 111A, had produced a re-engined version. With the earlier variant's 690 hp BMW VI 6,0 Z engines replaced by more powerful 960-1000 hp Daimler Benz DB 600Aa's, the He 111B was tested at Rechlin during the autumn of 1936. Cleared for acceptance and entry into service within the space of just a few weeks, the B-model thus became the first of a long line of He 111 variants to equip an operational Luftwaffe bomber unit.

And that unit was I./KG 157, which had originally been brought into being on 1 June 1934 as the *Fliegergruppe* 'Fassberg'. In the spring of 1935 the *Gruppe* became I./KG 154, and it was given the honour title 'Boelcke' in memory of the famous World War 1 fighter ace. A year later the unit moved from Fassberg to Hannover-Langenhagen where, in October 1936, it became I./KG 157. It was shortly after this, during the winter of 1936/37, that the *Gruppe* finally exchanged its elderly Dornier Do 23s for new He 111Bs.

The first He 111B-1s entered service with I./KG 157 'Boelcke' in the winter of 1936/37

The remaining two *Gruppen* of the *Kampfgeschwader* 'Boelcke' – II./KG 157 at Wunstorf and III./KG 157 at Delmenhorst, both of which were flying Ju 52/3ms – were likewise re-equipped during the first half of 1937.

Three more *Kampfgeschwader* began converting to the Heinkel bomber during the course of 1937. But re-equipment for these units was to prove a very lengthy process as a significant proportion of early He 111 production was being diverted elsewhere – to the *Legion Condor* in Spain!

IBERIAN BAPTISM OF FIRE

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 had polarised Europe. Hitler's Germany was quick to side with Gen Franco, sending a fleet of 20 Ju 52/3m bomber-transports to assist in the airlifting of Nationalist troops across the Straits of Gibraltar from Spanish Morocco to southern mainland Spain. In response, Stalin despatched a Soviet expeditionary force, including nearly 150 aircraft, to support the Republican Government. This in turn prompted Hitler to increase his aid to the Nationalists, and in November 1936 the *Legion Condor*, a standing force of some 100 first-line aircraft plus supporting troops, was established on Spanish soil.

The following month the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini created a similar, albeit smaller, force for service alongside the Nationalists. And with the Republicans bolstered by the Communist-organised International Brigades, all the main protagonists were in place, the battle lines had been drawn and the fighting started to rapidly escalate.

But operations in Spain had already provided some unwelcome surprises for the Germans. Foremost among them were the inadequacies displayed by the *Legion Condor's* aircraft, particularly the Ju 52/3m bombers, which were said to be 'outclassed in all respects by their Russian opponents'. It was to report on this disturbing situation that one of the *Legion's* leading bomber exponents, Oberleutnant Rudolf *Freiherr* von Moreau, was summoned back to Berlin at the end of 1936 – just as the He 111B was beginning to enter service with I./KG 157.

With the prestige of his still relatively fledgling Luftwaffe at stake, Hermann Göring decided to risk committing a small force composed of his three newest bomber types to the Spanish venture. He reasoned that, although the machines were almost completely untried (the debacle of the He 111A in China had yet to unfold), this was a unique opportunity to test their capabilities in battle. Early in 1937, therefore, 12 of the new generation of German bombers – four He 111Bs, four Do 17Es and four Ju 86Ds – were shipped to the Iberian war zone, arriving at Seville in mid-February.

Here, they were formed into an experimental bomber *Staffel* known as VB/88 under the command of Oberleutnant von Moreau. Operational conditions in Spain soon established the combat potential, or otherwise, of the three types. With its uncertain handling and unreliable diesel engines, the Ju 86D came a very poor third. One example crashed behind enemy lines within days of the unit's activation. And although it was rapidly replaced, two more aircraft had been lost by the early summer of 1937. The surviving duo were then 'handed over' to the Spaniards for a substantial fee!

The Do 17E was considered to be on a par with the He 111B in terms of handling and general performance, but was let down by its limited bomb-carrying capacity. One of the four was lost, shot down by an I-15 fighter over Bilbao on 18 April 1937. Deliveries were to continue, however, and some dozen in all had been sent to Spain before the decision was taken to standardise VB/88 on He 111s. The remaining Dorniers (a second having been lost in the interim) were subsequently transferred to the *Legion's* reconnaissance *Gruppe*.

The Heinkel had proven itself beyond doubt to be the superior machine of the three. Not only was it to equip VB/88 in its entirety, it would go on to become the *Legion's* standard bomber. In all, nearly 100 He 111s were to serve in Spain.

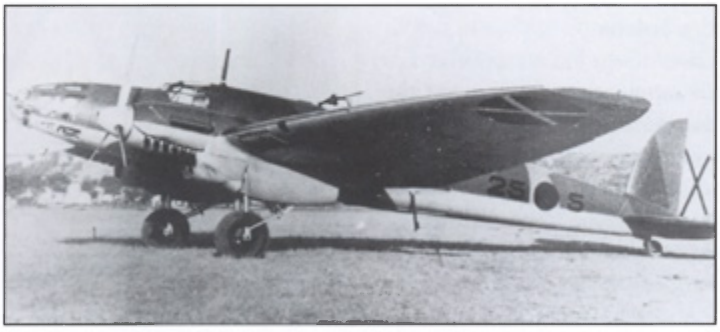
The Heinkels made their operational debut on 9 March 1937, bombing Republican airfields around Madrid in support of the Nationalist attack on the Spanish capital that had been launched just two days earlier. After carrying out several more such raids in the central region, they were then transferred, along with other units of the *Legion*, to the northern front on 29 March as part of the build-up for the forthcoming offensive against Bilbao.

Based at Burgos, the four He 111s of VB/88 spent most of the next three months playing a small but significant role in the reduction of the 'iron ring' of defences around Bilbao. By far the most controversial raid in which they took part during this period was the bombing of the small Basque town of Guernica on 26 April 1937. A contemporary Reuters report declared that one of their foreign correspondents on the ground had counted '52 Junkers heavy bombers, 111 Heinkel light bombers and 51 Heinkel fighters' flying overhead, but this was clearly a case of a badly worded cable causing confusion between the designations of the German aircraft involved and their supposed numbers. In fact, only three He 111s at most participated in the Guernica operation, as one aircraft was reportedly unserviceable on that date.

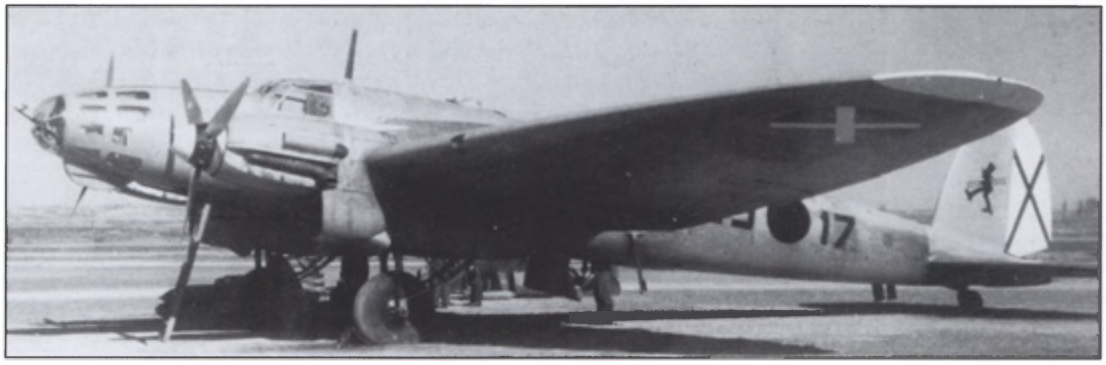
In July the Republicans launched a counter-offensive at Brunete, close to Madrid, primarily with the aim of relieving the growing pressure on their northern forces. The attack achieved its end and the bulk of the *Legion Condor* was returned post-haste to the central sector. Here, however, the Germans now found themselves facing strong opposition from Soviet I-16 fighters, and within a week the Heinkels had been forced to restrict their activities primarily to the hours of darkness.

July 1937 also saw the arrival in Spain of 16 more He 111s. The experimental VB/88 had served its purpose (by demonstrating that the Heinkel was clearly the best bomber in the Luftwaffe's armoury), and it was therefore decided to incorporate the unit into the *Legion's* established *Kampfgruppe* as a new fourth *Staffel* – 4.K/88. During the coming months all three of K/88's original *Staffeln* of Ju 52/3ms would also be re-equipped with the new Heinkels.

The He 111 may have been good, but it was not invincible. And in



The first machine of the second batch of He 111B-1s to be sent to Spain, '25.5' would originally have been wearing an overall grey scheme upon its arrival in July 1937. By the time this photograph was taken it had been repainted in splinter camouflage to match later deliveries



August 1937 – by which time the *Legion* had returned to the northern front and daylight operations – the inevitable happened. The first Heinkels were lost to enemy action. Two were shot down by Republican fighters near Santander on 23 August and a third over Gijón ten days later. After the final defeat of the Republicans in the north, heralded by the capture of Gijón on 21 October, the He 111s of K/88 became embroiled in 'several weeks of intensive raids' on enemy airfields.

The ground fighting flared up again in mid-December 1937 when the Republicans attacked the town of Teruel, 240 km to the east of Madrid. Despite the atrocious winter weather, the *Legion* was immediately called upon to help the besieged defenders. On 17 December a force of 23 Heinkels – further recent deliveries had by this time raised K/88's establishment to some 40+ machines – took off from Burgo de Osma, only to be scattered by the raging blizzards. One aircraft, '25.32', forced-landed intact behind Republican lines. It was a major prize. After being test flown in Spain by a French technical mission, the He 111 was dismantled and shipped to the Soviet Union together with a similarly acquired Messerschmitt Bf 109B fighter.

The Nationalists did not succeed in recapturing Teruel until the end of February 1938. They followed this up with a major offensive of their own that was to take them further east across Aragon all the way to the Mediterranean coast, which they reached in mid-April. For the Heinkels of K/88, April 1938 would prove to be the costliest month of their entire Spanish war. They suffered 14 of their 49 overall recorded losses during these four weeks alone. Many of the casualties were written off in accidents due to the increased scale of operations, but on 25 April a trio of Spanish I-16 pilots claimed a Heinkel apiece, all three bombers being downed in the Valencia region.

Franco's advance to Spain's east coast had split Republican-held territory in two, driving a 120 km wedge between Catalonia in the far northeast of the country and the main Government forces around and to the southeast of Madrid. One of K/88's top priorities now was the enemy's Mediterranean supply ports. In addition to bombing airfields and columns of retreating Republican troops, the Heinkels targeted the ports of Sagunto, Cartagena and Almería. These attacks were carried out both in daylight – by massed formations of anything up to 40 bombers – and by individual machines under cover of darkness.

One anonymous aircraft commander has left the following account of one such night raid;

Early *Legion Condor* Heinkels wore a plethora of national, unit and personal markings. The 'lucky' chimney sweep seen here on the tailfin of the all-grey '25.17' appeared on at least one other machine ('25.8'). Also just visible (above the wing leading edge) is part of the long red and yellow tail of 1.K/88's 'Swastika comet' emblem carried beneath the cockpit

A personal marking of a special kind that was applied to both sides of the tailfin of '25.15', this tribute was paid by the crew of the bomber to their pet Scottie dog 'Peter', who evidently flew on operations with them until his death in action over the port of Sagunto on 13 June 1938

'I look at my watch – 13 minutes past midnight. We've been aloft in our trusty "25.31" for ten minutes now. Hanging in the bomb-bays are two 250 kg and twenty-four 50 kg bombs.

'The *Staffel's* orders tonight are for six separate attacks to be mounted by single machines at irregular intervals between 2000 hrs and 0600 hrs. We are flying the third mission.

'My plan is to approach the dock area at an altitude of 6000 metres and then glide down to a height of 4000 metres with engines throttled back before releasing my bombs. This way I hope to avoid detection by the enemy's flak and his numerous searchlights for as long as possible.

'While I am busy making my preparations for the bomb run, the wireless operator reports over the intercom that the machine ahead of us has just radioed "Bombs away" back to base. The message gives no further details, so presumably he has not encountered any opposition.

'The flight engineer begins to drape cloths over the pilot's windows. This is to prevent his being blinded by the glare of searchlights. It's a necessary precaution. While we were waiting to take off, the machine flying the first of the night's missions had returned. It seems it had approached the target from the seaward side and had been coned by about a dozen searchlights. The pilot had been unable to see a thing. That's not going to happen to us!

'As we climb through 3800 metres the flight engineer helps the pilot put on his oxygen mask. Then he takes up his combat station aft. A short time later my three crew members report all oxygen masks working properly and the gunners' positions manned.

'For the moment we are still flying over "white", or friendly, territory. The villages below are lit up as if it were peacetime. There's no need for them to bother about blackouts down there, as the Reds' "Martin" (sic) bombers don't dare venture as far into hostile airspace as we do. A dark shape slides past some 500 metres below us to the left. It's the second machine returning to base. We have spotted each other and briefly flash our lights in recognition. Then we douse our navigation lights and head for the target.

'It's a glorious night! The moon is a pale disc behind a thin veil of cloud. I lay in the nose with my maps spread out in front of me. The Reds have switched one of their jamming transmitters on again. There is a constant cheeping and chirruping in our headphones. Our ears have long become accustomed to all the noises the aircraft makes. We only hear the engines when something is not right and they start to 'grumble'. The rhythmic popping of the 24 exhaust stubs to the right and left of the cockpit registers only dimly in our subconscious minds.

'The pilot's voice sounds over the intercom – "6000 metres, levelling off". There's a small town beneath us. I recognise it from the large fire that has been burning for a good three days now, probably the result of some demolition work carried out by the retreating Reds. If I push myself forward into the very front of the nose compartment, ahead of the reflected glare of the exhaust flames, the coastline and the Mediterranean beyond are clearly visible. We are banking slightly, turning in towards the target. The town is not fully blacked out. The harbour itself is easily identifiable by the large areas of stygian darkness between the rows of lights spaced along the jetties.

'"Wireless operator!" "Wireless-operator here". "Lower the pot". "Lowering the pot". "Pilot!" "Pilot here". "Throttle back, lose altitude slowly!" "Throttling back, losing altitude slowly". When is the enemy going to wake up to our presence?

'There's a lot of traffic on the roads – mostly trucks. From the number of headlights it looks like a general retreat. It's been going on like this for many days now! We glide down towards the harbour. There is absolute silence within the aircraft. The final orders have been given. Every member of the crew has been instructed not to use the R/T unless strictly necessary. There are some minor alterations to our course still to be made, and I must not be distracted now. The engines are murmuring softly to themselves. One more minute to go and then I'll be able to lay our "eggs". Are we really going to get away with it?!

'Just 30 seconds more! I'm already beginning to congratulate myself when, suddenly, six searchlights spring into life on the southern outskirts of the town. They are immediately joined by others – I quickly count 15 or 20. Like cold fingers of death they probe the surrounding darkness, searching for the intruder overhead. At first they are off target, deceived by our throttled-back engines into believing that we are still some distance away approaching from the sea like the two previous He 111s.

'One last small adjustment and then I release my bombs. I am not able to follow their fall as I can during our daylight raids. But the lights on the control panel go out one after the other with the satisfying regularity of clockwork.

'It is only a matter of seconds until all the bombs have left their magazines and are tumbling earthwards 30 metres apart. But it seems much longer, especially now that the searchlight beams are carving elegant but menacing arcs through the night sky towards us. Each column of light is spitting tiny sparks, or at least that's what it looks like as the flak gunners aim along the beams. As we turn steeply away I see the explosions far below as our stick of bombs marches across the dock.

'The wireless operator reports two searchlight beams directly behind us. The flak bursts accompanying them are about 200 metres too high, but their aim can't be faulted. We continue our diving turn, losing a good five metres a second. Behind his makeshift screens the pilot is still flying completely blind, and so the wireless operator, who is best placed to keep watch on the pair of ghostly fingers searching for us, shouts instructions – "Turn left! Now dive! That's shaken them loose!"

'The flak shells are still exploding off to our right, but are now too low. Our speed soon takes us out of the danger zone. We descend to 2500 metres and get ready to engage the road convoys with our machine guns. The long streams of tracer make a pretty sight. Five minutes have passed since we dropped our bombs and I am just fitting a new drum of ammunition when, without warning, a glowing burst of fire shoots past the cockpit. "Nightfighter on our tail!" the rear gunner yells, "Attacking from above!"

'The pilot has ripped the cloth screens away from his windows. We are now turning more violently than before. A *Rata*! "Cease fire everyone!" I shout. "Pilot, don't lose any more height!"

'This guy in his *Rata* has spotted our machine gun fire – by pure chance he must have been quite close to us! And from this range our telltale exhaust flames have got to be clearly visible to him as well. But

you should have made sure of us with your first burst, my lad. You've caught us napping once – you won't find it so easy a second time!

'"Pilot, keep turning and slowly gain height! Rear gunner, wireless operator, don't open fire unless we're under direct attack. The pilot has control!"

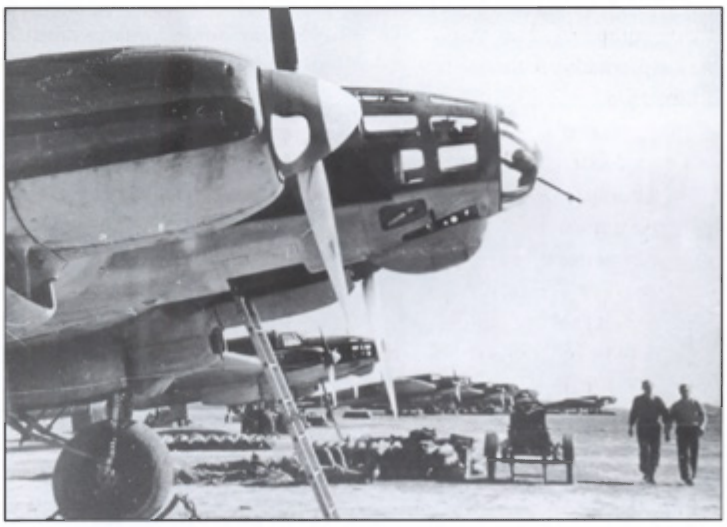
'Hardly are the words out of my mouth when a second stream of fire narrowly misses our machine – this time from behind and below. Give this boy his due, he's damned good – certainly no beginner! In reply, the wireless operator aims a short burst at the source of the fire. Then it's all quiet again. The little glow-worms of reddish tracer sink slowly away into the darkness. Two more brief bursts of fire light the night sky, but further off to our right. The nightfighter has evidently lost us and is trying to draw our fire, but we're not falling for that trick.

'As we cross back over into friendly airspace we report our mission accomplished. I tell the wireless operator to add, "Achtung, nightfighters!" The next machine has been warned.'

An anonymous splinter-camouflaged He 111 of the *Legion* attacks Republican positions in the hills. Note the ventral machine-gunner's 'pot' lowered in case of enemy fighter attack

Towards the end of July 1938 the Republicans launched one last desperate attempt to rejoin the two halves of their divided territory by attacking across the River Ebro, which marked the northern flank of Franco's 'corridor to the sea'. The month ahead was to witness some of the largest aerial battles of the entire Civil War.

Immediately prior to the Battle of the Ebro K/88 had received its first He 111Es, a new variant with more powerful Junkers Jumo 211A engines and capable of carrying twice the bomb load of its predecessor. The *Gruppe's* primary objectives during the Ebro fighting were the river's many crossing points. And although enemy fighters were up in force, it was the Republican anti-aircraft batteries defending these vital supply bottlenecks that took the heaviest toll of K/88's bombers.



An impressive array of *Legion* He 111Es, their increased bomb carrying capacity evidenced by the amount of ordnance waiting to be loaded aboard

In addition to the many machines that returned to base damaged, the majority of the eight total losses suffered before the Republicans were driven back across the Ebro in mid-November 1938 had fallen victim to flak. They included 3. *Staffel's* '25.41', which was brought down over Gandesa on 20 August. All four members of the crew managed to bail out, but the aircraft commander struck the tailplane and was killed.

By the end of November K/88's strength had been reduced to little more than two-dozen serviceable machines. This was partly due to

The crew of a 2.K/88 machine don their parachutes in readiness for another mission

the *Gruppe* handing over a number of its early He 111Bs to the Spanish Nationalist Air Force, a process that was to continue after the arrival of a further batch of new He 111Es in early 1939.

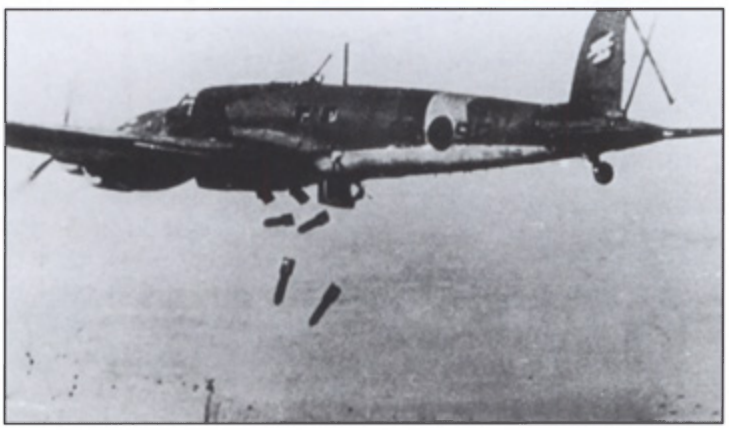
The final act of the Spanish drama was played out in the northeast of the country with the opening of the Nationalist offensive against Catalonia on 24 December 1938. Enemy resistance was quickly overcome and the whole province was in Franco's hands by mid-February 1939. Fighting would sputter on around Madrid and to the south for another six weeks, but the outcome was now inevitable.

Ironically, the last Heinkel of K/88 to be lost was that of the *Gruppenkommandeur*, Major Haerle. It exploded in mid-air during a raid on the airfield at Alcalà de Henares, to the east of Madrid, on 12 March 1939. Apparently, one of the aircraft's 250 kg bombs had failed to release from its magazine and was hung up in the bomb-bay. Attempts to shake it loose had instead caused it to detonate, ripping the machine apart and killing Haerle and his crew instantly.

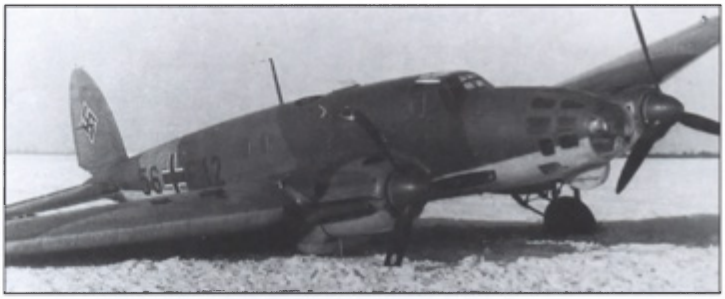
The Republic surrendered on the last day of March 1939. K/88's surviving Heinkels were left in Spain, where the final few were to remain in service with the Spanish Air Force until the late 1950s. Their crews returned home to Germany with the rest of the *Legion Condor*, where a heroes' welcome awaited them.

In Hitler's Reich, meanwhile, the re-equipment of the Luftwaffe's bomber arm with successive variants of the He 111 had slowly been gathering pace since I./KG 157 had first exchanged its Do 23s for the then new He 111B more than two years before. Next in line had been III./LG 1. The *Lehrgeschwader* was a special unit, each of whose component *Gruppen* was charged with evaluating and developing specific types of aircraft for operational deployment. The *Geschwader's* III. *Gruppe* was responsible for new bombers and, consequently, in February 1937 it had taken delivery of nine He 111Bs and nine Do 17s (but, apparently, no Ju 86s!).

Although of indifferent quality, this shot of '25.92' – one of the last He 111Es delivered to the *Legion* – shows that the 'Diving Eagle with Bomb' emblem originally introduced by Oberleutnant von Moreau (see colour profile 1) was moved from the fuselage to the tailfin when used as the badge of 4.K/88



Another *Gruppe* to be issued with He 111s during the course of 1937 was II./KG 257 (the future II./KG 26). And during the winter of 1937/38 KG 155, later to become KG 55, began to exchange its short-lived Ju 86s for He 111Es. It was at this time, too, that KG 355 – the unit which, after its redesignation as KG 53, was to be given the honour title *'Legion Condor'* – also started to re-equip with He 111s.



'56+E12', one of 2./KG 155's new He 111Es, comes to grief in the snow at Lippstadt in the winter of 1937/38

These four groundcrew seem oblivious to the combined roar of the 1820 horses of the two DB 600C engines only a few feet away from them. The white shield of the 'Seated lion' unit badge proclaims the source of the noise to be a machine of I./KG 257, and the Werk-Nummer (1517) identifies it as a Rostock-built He 111B-1

On 13 March 1938 the 23 machines of III./KG 355 were the only Heinkels among the 128 Luftwaffe bombers that staged a flypast over Vienna to mark the annexation of Austria 24 hours earlier. A sudden deterioration in the weather prevented the bombers from continuing on to Graz to carry out a similar demonstration. Instead, thick cloud and heavy snowstorms forced the units to scatter and find their way back to their bases in southern Germany singly or in small groups. However, one of III./KG 355's Heinkels failed to make it back to Giebelstadt. The bomber crashed near Aschach, killing its four-man crew.

With production stepping up, the next six months were to see three more *Kampfgeschwader* converting, either wholly or partially, to the Heinkel bomber. By the time of the Munich Crisis in September 1938 no fewer than 16 *Kampfgruppen* were equipped with He 111s. Briefly (with their wartime designations given in brackets), these were;

KG 155 (KG 55) – two *Gruppen* of E-models
KG 157 (KG 27) – three *Gruppen* of B-models
KG 253 ((KG 4) – two *Gruppen* of J-models, plus one of E-models
KG 254 (KG 54) – two *Gruppen* of E-models and P-models
KG 257 (KG 26) – two *Gruppen* of B-models
KG 355 (KG 53) – three *Gruppen* of E-models and P-models
III.(K)/LG 1 – a mix of He 111Es and Do 17Ms

In addition to these 16 *Gruppen*, 8. *Kompanie* (i.e. 8. *Staffel*) of the so-called *Luftnachrichten-Abteilung* 100 ('Aerial Signals Department 100') had been activated early in July 1938 on He 111Ps. As befitted

this unit's special role – Ln.Abt.100 was ultimately to grow into KG 100, the Luftwaffe's premier pathfinder *Geschwader* – its machines were equipped with the new and highly secret X-*Gerät* radio-navigation device.

As can be seen from the unit listing, the first of the new generation He 111Ps were already beginning to enter service. These, and the parallel He 111H development of 1939 (the two types differing primarily in their powerplants) both featured the round, fully-glazed nose that is now synonymous with Heinkel's most famous wartime bomber. In fact, by the outbreak of hostilities in September 1939, He 111P/H variants equipped all but one of the 21 first-line *Kampfgruppen* flying Heinkels. The numerous earlier 'stepped-cockpit' examples of the He 111 – mostly Es – that had been retired during the last 12 months of peace in Europe went on to see widespread use in training schools and a variety of other ancillary units.

By the late summer of 1939 most Heinkel *Gruppen* were equipped with new P and H variants. But these He 111Ps cavorting low over the German countryside are not preparing for war. Bearing spurious codes and unit badges, they are starring in a popular wartime feature film chronicling the exploits of the fictitious *'Kampfgeschwader Lützow'*!

Four more *Kampfgruppen* were to convert to Heinkels in 1939. In April IV./KG 152 exchanged its Ju 86Gs for He 111Es. In the major redesignation programme of the following month this *Gruppe* was to emerge as I./KG 1, while in July I./KG 152 – which, perversely, had retained its original three-figure identity – likewise relinquished the last of its Ju 86Gs, albeit for new He 111Hs. And then, only a matter of days before the war began, KG 51, which (as KG 255) had been the first *Kampfgeschwader* to be equipped with Do 17s, now became the last to receive Heinkels when, in just two weeks – from 15 to 30 August 1939 – its two *Gruppen* hurriedly converted onto He 111Hs. Not surprisingly perhaps, KG 51 did not see action in Poland. The vast majority of the Luftwaffe's He 111 *Kampfgruppen* did, however.

The question was, had the lessons of Spain been learned?

The advent of new generation He 111s resulted in the relegation of most earlier models to multi-engined flying schools. Did the pilot of this B-2 serving with FFS (C) 12 at Prague-Ruzyne in early 1940 commit the cardinal sin and forget to lower his undercarriage before landing?

POLAND

In the early hours of 1 September 1939 – the first morning of the world's first *Blitzkrieg* – two-thirds of the Luftwaffe's entire He 111 bomber force was being readied for a coordinated strike against Poland's main military and naval air bases.

Seven of the twelve He 111 *Kampfgruppen* scheduled to take part in the operation were subordinated to *Luftflotten* 1 and 4, the two air fleets based in the eastern half of Germany facing the border with Poland. Two more were stationed in East Prussia, the province cut off from the rest of the Reich by the intervening 'Polish Corridor'. The final three, forming part of *Luftflotte* 2, were stationed in northwest Germany. After completing their first mission, however, this latter trio were to land back on airfields around Berlin for temporary attachment to *Luftflotte* 1.

Such was the plan, but it was thrown into disarray by the weather. Dawn broke to reveal almost the entire region blanketed in low cloud and fog. Paradoxically, the only *Gruppe* to take off at 0430 hrs as briefed was the sole unit still equipped with the He 111E, Kolberg-based I./KG 1 'Hindenburg'. Its objective was the Polish Naval Air Arm's seaplane base at Puck (Putzig), on the Baltic coast at the northern end of the infamous 'Corridor'. A war correspondent flying in one of the bombers recorded his impressions of this first He 111 mission of World War 2;

'Today, Friday, shortly after dawn, the *Staffeln* took off and headed eastwards. The rays of the rising sun reflected warmly on the camouflaged wings of the bombers. But it wasn't long before the sun disappeared again behind a dense wall of fog that towered up into the sky ahead of us. It was only after a lengthy period of bad-weather flying, which demanded the utmost concentration from all the crews, that our formation reached the Polish land and naval air station at Putzig. There, Mother Nature was kind to us. The weather cleared just as we arrived over the target area, and even from our great height every detail could be made out.

'I am sitting alongside the pilot on the folding seat that has just been vacated by the navigator/bomb aimer. He has clambered forward into the front of the nose and is now preparing for the bomb run. A moment ago I thought I heard a series of muffled thuds above the noise of the engines. Are the Poles actually shooting at us? While I am still pondering the matter, the pilot nudges me and points a finger upwards. He's heard the explosions too. I feel a sense of satisfaction at being under fire for what would a combat mission be without some kind of response from the enemy!

I./KG 1 'Hindenburg' was the only *Kampfgruppe* still equipped with He 111Es upon the outbreak of hostilities on 1 September 1939

'Suddenly the aircraft gives a lurch. The bombs have left their magazines. I crane my neck to peer through the cockpit window and can see them tumbling down behind us, looking for all the world like beer bottles being thrown into a river from a high bridge.

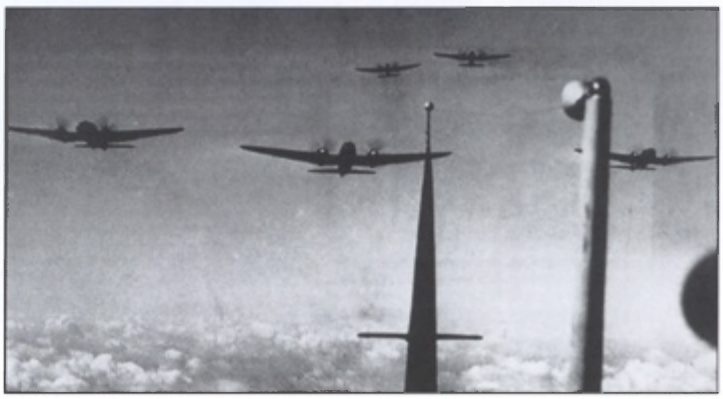
'The pilot pokes me in the ribs again and indicates the altimeter. We are flying at an altitude of 5000 metres and he's leading our two wingmen into a gentle left-hand turn that will enable us all to see the results of our bombing. And, hurrah! It's bang on target. The flickering flashes of bomb blasts straddle the seaplane base and surrounding areas. A few of our bombs have gone into the harbour, sending up huge fountains of water. Others have hit several large hangars. Columns of smoke rise into the air, grow bigger and start to spread. The attack has been a success.'

The primary target for I./KG 1's sister *Gruppe*, I./KG 152, was the Polish airfield at Torun (Thorn). But the slight sea breeze that had kept the fog at bay and had enabled I./KG 1 to take off from coastal Kolberg as planned did not penetrate the 30 km inland to I./KG 152's base at Pinnow, near Reselkow. There, it was 0900 hrs before the ground mist cleared sufficiently to permit the He 111Hs to lift off. They too were met by sporadic flak, but all aircraft returned to Pinnow without loss.

Further south still, *Luftflotte* 1's two other *Gruppen* – also scheduled to attack the Thorn airfields – had to wait even longer. On their forward landing ground at Schönfeld-Crossinsee the crews of I./KG 53 had been at readiness since 0230 hrs. But it was nearly midday before they took off to rendezvous with the Heinkels of II./KG 26 from nearby Gabbert. Both *Gruppen* then flew a second mission later that same afternoon, I./KG 53 going back to Thorn, this time to target flak emplacements and fuel depots, while II./KG 26 hit railway yards at Poznan (Posen). These two units also completed the day without loss, as too did the three *Gruppen* of KG 27 from *Luftflotte* 2, which carried out a massed raid on Warsaw by all 90+ of their available He 111Ps prior to coming under the temporary control of *Luftflotte* 1 for the remainder of the campaign.

In East Prussia one of the two He 111-equipped *Gruppen* of LG 1 was not so fortunate. II. and III./LG 1's main objectives for the day were airfields in the Warsaw area. The specific target for the nine machines of 5./LG 1 was an airfield near Modlin, but *en route* the *Staffel* reported coming under attack from '25 Polish fighters'. Four bombers were damaged and a fifth shot down. Having lifted off from Powunden with the rest of II. *Gruppe* at about 0730 hrs, the luckless 'L1+KN' may thus have the dubious distinction of being the first He 111 to be lost to enemy action in World War 2, for the only other known Heinkel casualty of 1 September was a machine of KG 4, whose three *Gruppen* were not cleared for take-off until very nearly 1300 hrs.

As the sole He 111 bomber presence under *Luftflotte* 4 in the far south, KG 4's main effort was directed against the Cracow airfields. These were subjected to



The realities of war quickly exposed the Heinkel's fundamental weaknesses, as unescorted formations such as this would soon learn to their cost

Armourers prepare what appear to be incendiary devices as 9./LG 1's 'L1+IT' waits patiently under cover of the trees bordering Prowehren airfield

the combined weight of I. and III. *Gruppen*, while II./KG 4 despatched a *Staffel* each to the airfields at Lwów (Lemberg), Lublin and Deblin. Although 5./KG 4's raid on Deblin was reported as being 'particularly successful', it was from this mission that a machine had failed to return.

Marred only by the weather, the Heinkel's operational debut in Poland was adjudged highly satisfactory. The second day of the campaign was a repeat of the first, with KG 4 attacking Deblin and the northern *Kampfgruppen* concentrating on targets in the 'Polish Corridor', Posen and Warsaw. Losses were again minimal, although three Polish fighters claimed a Heinkel apiece near Posen. But a disturbing number of reports were emerging of He 111s coming under fire from their own flak.

On 3 September, despite the declarations of war on Germany by Great Britain and France, the Heinkel force ranged against Poland was further reinforced by two more *Gruppen* of He 111Ps from *Luftflotte* 2. Departing their bases in northwest Germany, I. and II./KG 55 flew to airfields near Breslau to operate alongside KG 4 as part of *Luftflotte* 4.

By this time the initial strikes against Polish air bases were being scaled down. The Luftwaffe believed that it had already achieved its aim of neutralising the enemy's air force. Although substantial damage *had* been inflicted, many of the Polish aircraft destroyed on the ground by bombing had been trainers and other secondary machines, some deliberately left out on display as decoys. The bulk of the Polish Air Force's first-line PZL fighters had in fact been deployed to small satellite landing grounds just before the German invasion.

With the bombers now giving greater priority to the enemy's communications and lines of supply, KG 55's first mission – flown on the morning of 4 September – was directed against rail traffic in Kielce and Cracow. It was on this date too that Polish resistance on the ground, which had been strong up until now, began to show signs of weakening. The opening phase in the defence of Poland, the so-called 'Frontier Battle', was drawing to a close and Polish forces were falling back with the intention of forming a new line along the Vistula and San rivers.

It was a similar situation in the far north. There, the detested 'Corridor' – the cause of so much friction, both manufactured and otherwise, between Germany and Poland – was on the point of being eliminated. This would leave the invading Germans free to wheel southwards and

An early casualty of the Polish campaign, this anonymous machine has pulled off a successful belly landing on a Baltic beach

advance on Warsaw. Another war correspondent provided an account of a raid on Bydgoszcz, a town at the base of the corridor, shortly before its fall on 5 September;

'15 minutes to go before take-off, which is scheduled for 1000 hrs. The usual early morning mist has lifted and the bombers are bathed in sunlight. They are dispersed about the field, separated into *Ketten* and *Staffeln*, and groundcrews are carrying out last-minute checks. Small groups of NCOs are making their way across the broad expanse of open grass towards their aircraft, where they are joined by their officers returning from *Staffel* briefings.

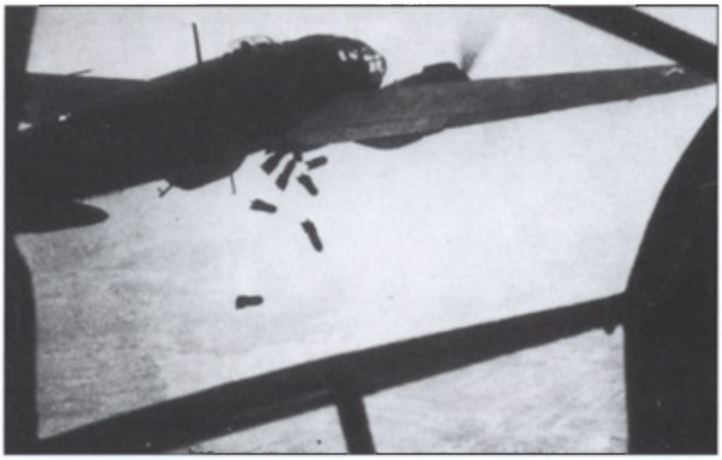
'We – that is the pilot, navigator/bomb aimer, wireless operator/upper gunner, flight engineer/ventral gunner, plus my good self as supernumerary camera operator/gunner – climb into our crate "*C-Cäsar*" through the "bathtub", the gondola on the underside of the fuselage. The crew take their places, the upper gunner wriggling into his revolving cradle seat and traversing his machine gun. Our leutnant, who acts as both navigator and bomb aimer, is already studying his maps.

'Everything is in order. On the dot of 1000 hrs the chocks are pulled away from the wheels, 2400 horses begin to bellow as the pilot guns the engines and we start to roll. I catch a glimpse of the runway marshal waving his green and white flag and moments later we are in the air. To our left the other machines of the *Staffel* appear above the tiny wood bordering the field and close up on us. One last circuit. The small white dot tearing about on the grass below is the *Staffel* mascot, a cheeky little terrier who answers to the name of "Flox". He's obviously none too pleased that his many masters have deserted him and are making such an infernal din as they climb away into the sky.

'We quickly gain height. At the head of the formation the *Staffelführer's* machine sets course eastwards. The aircraft alongside us has already retracted its wheels. From the movements of its machine guns I can tell that the gunners over there are also at their posts and already scanning the sky.

Another aircraft, unit unknown, takes to the air. The flak personnel manning the predictor at the end of the runway pay no heed. Only the officer on the right ducks involuntarily as the bomber roars low overhead

'We break through a thin but dense layer of cloud. Above us a clear sky the colour of steel. Below us an enormous ocean of white cotton wool, its smooth surface broken here and there by towering cloud formations. We have already crossed the Reich's border, but as yet there has been no sign of the enemy. I



Stowed vertically, nose upwards in their magazines, a Heinkel's bombs gave the impression of tumbling indiscriminately when first released

leave the cockpit and clamber down through the small fuselage hatch into the "bathtub". The ventral gunner grins at me and gives me a hefty punch on the shoulder. The bruise that develops will be the only wound I have to show for flying this particular mission.

'The cloud is beginning to break up a little. Now and again a village, a patch of woodland or a small lake can be seen, only to disappear again just as quickly. The *Staffel* continues on its way undisturbed. Nine grey-green specks suddenly pop up behind us out of nowhere. They rapidly overtake us and turn out to be German fighters, Messerschmitt 109s. As they cross our path they waggle their wings in greeting. We return the compliment, but in a slower and more sedate manner as befits a bomber.

'It can't be long now. Up in front the pilot and navigator have got their eyes glued to the *Staffelkapitan's* machine. The clouds have thinned out even more now to reveal several larger towns. There! The leading aircraft is opening its bomb-bay doors. Our leutnant lies ready and waiting, peering intently into his bombsight. Now!

'Large grey shapes tumble from the machine ahead. We immediately release our own bombs. Soon the first bombs can be seen exploding among buildings on the banks of a river. Now all the other aircraft are dropping their bombs, followed by glittering silver shoals of incendiaries.

'By this time the Polish flak has opened up, but the enemy's fire is confused and inaccurate. The whole affair has lasted little more than two minutes. We have reversed course, the clouds have closed in again beneath us and we are all safely on our way back to base.'

Between 4 and 6 September I./KG 1 and I./KG 152 moved up from their bases in Pomerania to forward landing grounds closer to the Polish border. The transfer resulted in each unit suffering its first casualty of the campaign. The loss of I./KG 152's 'V4+A13' on 5 September has been variously attributed both to Warsaw's flak defences and to PZL fighters. The former is perhaps marginally the more likely, as Polish fighter pilots initially described their victim as a Bf 110.

Pictured from the nose of the machine on its tail, this He 111P of 2./KG 27 – reportedly *en route* to bomb Warsaw-Okecie – displays the greatly enlarged wing crosses that were intended to dissuade gung-ho Luftwaffe fighter pilots from attacking their own

A more disturbing case of faulty aircraft recognition occurred the following day when a machine of I./KG 1 was shot down near Łodz with the loss of its crew. One source identified the culprit as a Bf 109D fighter of I./ZG 2 (although, understandably perhaps, there is no

record of any Messerschmitt pilot submitting a claim for an He 111 on the date in question!). Such incidents were not uncommon in Poland, Heinkel crews frequently reporting instances of 'friendly fire', both from the ground and in the air. Fortunately, few proved fatal. But the situation was considered serious enough for many He 111 units to have grossly oversized crosses painted on the upper and lower wings of their aircraft.

I./KG 4 was also in action not far from Łódz on 6 September, losing three of their number – one to flak and the other pair to PZL fighters – while attacking bridges over the Vistula south of Warsaw.

With the campaign in Poland nearing the end of its first week, it was apparent that the demarcation line between *Luftflotten* 1 and 4's areas of operations was becoming much less rigidly defined. The ground fighting in the north of the country was all but over and the Luftwaffe's *Kampfgruppen* were beginning to direct their focus of attention to the south. Their main purpose now was to harry the retreating Polish army, stopping it from establishing a new defensive line along the Vistula and preventing any attempts to escape southeastwards into Rumania.

7 September thus witnessed not only LG 1's two East Prussian-based *Gruppen* targeting the railway network in central Poland, it also saw four of *Luftflotte* 1's He 111 units ordered to the southern sector. I./KG 1 and I./KG 152 left the Baltic coast area and transferred down to Breslau-Schöngarten, while II./KG 26 and I./KG 53 took up temporary residence at Nieder-Ellguth and Neudorf, also in Silesia. From here they were to fly low-level missions in direct support of the German army in the field.

This was a complete departure for the He 111s, whose primary role hitherto had been high-altitude bombing raids on fixed objectives. And these new missions were to expose another weakness in the basic Heinkel design. Although it had been the best of the trio of pre-war bombers tested by the Luftwaffe in terms of speed and bomb-carrying capacity, these attributes had been bought at the expense of arms and armour.

The first week of combat in Poland had already revealed that the Heinkel's relatively weak defensive armament made it vulnerable to determined fighter attack (something already hinted at in Spain). Now, low-level operations – usually carried out either singly or in *Ketten* of three aircraft – were to highlight the He 111's deficiency in armour and its susceptibility to an unlucky hit from light Flak or ground fire.

By 8 September spearheads of the German army had reached the outskirts of Warsaw. The final outcome of the campaign could no longer be in any doubt, but the fighting was far from over and the Heinkel Kampfgruppen continued to suffer casualties. On 9 September I./KG 1 lost two of its He 111Es to a combination of fighters and flak over Lublin. A machine of LG 1 was also lost on the same date, being forced to land behind enemy lines near Deblin.

Two newcomers to the Polish front had flown in to East Prussia on 8 September. Temporarily detached from their parent *Gruppen* in northwest Germany, 2./KG 54 and 5./KG 28 undertook their first missions 48 hours later. All aircraft returned safely from a high-altitude raid on Polish troop concentrations near Warsaw on the morning of 10 September. But a low-level attack by the two *Staffeln* on enemy columns in the same area later that afternoon was met by heavy ground fire that brought down one of 2./KG 54's He 111Ps.

The Heinkel *Gruppen* in Poland suffered at the hands of enemy fighters and ground fire alike. These appear to be machine gun bullet entry holes, which would suggest a fighter attack from above. Although not manoeuvrable enough always to be able to take effective avoiding action, the He 111 *was* sturdy and could usually absorb such damage as this and much more

The Polish army launched an ambitious counter-offensive along the River Bzura to the west of Warsaw on 11 September, but it was quickly and effectively brought to a halt, not least by the Luftwaffe's ground-support units backed up by the Heinkels of KGs 1, 4 and 26. Elsewhere, the other He 111 *Kampfgruppen* continued to strike at retreating enemy troop columns. Attacked by PZL fighters over Przemysl in the far south on 11 September, an He 111P of KG 55 had been forced down between the opposing lines. All those aboard were rescued from no-man's land by German troops.

The crew of a *Geschwaderstab* LG 1 Heinkel was not so fortunate. 'L1+CA', which took a direct flak hit over Warsaw on 11 September, was to be the fifth and final He 111H lost by the *Lehrgeschwader* during the campaign, for the Luftwaffe High Command had already issued orders for the gradual withdrawal of the Heinkel *Kampfgruppen* from the fighting in Poland. And among the first to retire were II. and III./LG 1. They departed on 12 September together with II./KG 26 and I./KG 53.

The following day most of the remaining units participated in Operation *Wasserkante* (Northern seaboard), the last mass raid on Warsaw. It was carried out by a force of some 180 bombers, and laid waste to further large areas of the Polish capital. Then, on 14 September, bad weather closed in. Flying activity was reduced to a minimum for much of the next week. At least one more Heinkel raid was flown against Warsaw, however, as witness the following account;

'Not to put too fine a point on it, the weather conditions were – to use an old flyers' expression – "an absolute pig". Every half-hour a slight break in the overcast. Every hour perhaps a brief glimpse of the sun. For the rest of the time an absolute "pea souper", hovering above the field at anything from 200 to 600 metres. But the "weather frogs" – the meteorologists – knew better. According to them an area of good weather was approaching from the southeast. Take-off was therefore scheduled for 1310 hrs.

'And so it turned out. On the dot of 1310 hrs the first *Staffeln* of our two *Gruppen* roared off. Our crew had drawn the short straw. We were assigned to bring up the rear of the whole formation and not only "lay our own eggs", but also take aerial photographs to establish the results of our two *Gruppen's* bombing. To revert back to flying jargon, we were to be the "Aunt Sally" in the event of any attack from astern.

'At least, we thought, we won't have to worry too much about navigation. Just follow the bunch in front of us. But no such luck! By the time we had climbed to 400 metres every single machine ahead of us had been swallowed up in the murk. We were thus very much on our own as we too plunged into the milky-grey blanket of fog.

'Our course was to take us to Praga, the eastern suburb of Warsaw, where, according to reports, the Poles were still holding out. At 2800 metres we finally emerged from the clouds. As we crossed into Poland we found

ourselves flying above a fantastic white carpet. Bathed in bright sunlight, the tops of the clouds, like tightly packed balls of cotton wool, stretched unbroken in every direction.

'Our navigator was beginning to look thoughtful. We had to be spot on target – not only to drop our own bombs, but also to make our photographic run. On top of that we had orders that, under no circumstances, were we to inflict any damage on the Polish capital's diplomatic quarter, which was separated from our objectives by nothing more than the width of the River Vistula.

'But we were in luck. Gaps began to appear in the clouds. And through one of them we could see in the far distance diagonally ahead of us the silver ribbon of the Vistula. It was unmistakeable, the river's many sandbanks turning it into a filigree of individual channels all sparkling in the sunlight.

'From our height of 4000 metres we dived quickly through the opening in the clouds and there spread out in front of us lay Warsaw. A brief glance took in the city's four bridges – ideal marker points, as the railway stations we were after were situated on the right bank of the river level with them. Below us we saw the last *Kette* of our *Gruppe* just leaving the target area and retiring northwards, pursued by heavy and fairly accurate flak.

'Once again fortune smiled on us. Despite the smoke hanging in the air we were able to line up our sights on the eastern railway station almost undisturbed. And by the time we came round again to take our photographs the enemy fire had died away completely. Mission accomplished!'

The bad weather of 15 September did not prevent I./KG 1's transfer from Breslau to Krosno, in southern Poland, on that date. The *Gruppe's* He 111Es may thus have become the only Heinkel bombers to operate from Polish soil, although they carried out relatively very few missions during the 48 hours they were there. 15 September also saw KG 55's only total loss of the campaign when a 1. *Staffel* crew failed to return from a raid on Dubno.

Poland's fate was finally sealed by the Red Army's invasion from the east on 17 September. By that time the He 111s' part in the campaign was effectively over. On 18 September, while still pinned down at Breslau by the adverse weather, I./KG 152 was officially redesignated to become II./KG 1. The following day both I. and II./KG 1 returned to their home bases, as too did I./KG 4.

Since their Dubno mission of 15 September both *Gruppen* of KG 55 had also remained grounded by the atrocious conditions. The rain had poured down, turning their fields into 'little more than mudholes'. But on 20 September the weather improved sufficiently to allow them to start withdrawing. 2./KG 54 and 5./KG 28 also returned to their parent *Gruppen* on 20 and 21 September respectively. The last He 111 *Kampfgruppen* of all to retire from the Polish campaign were II. and III./KG 4, which finally departed on 22 September.

The defenders of Warsaw were to hold out for five more days, and they suffered bombardment until the very end. However, with the Heinkels all back on their home fields, the final raids on the beleaguered Polish capital had to be carried out by Ju 52/3m transports, their crews reportedly 'shovelling incendiaries out of their side loading hatches'.

THE 'WATERY TRIANGLE' AND *WESERUBUNG*

During the opening days of World War 2 the only He 111-equipped *Kampfgruppe* of *Luftflotte* 2 not to be involved, either wholly or partly, in the Polish campaign was I./KG 26. Although initially based at Lübeck-Blankensee on the Baltic coast, this unit's attention was focused westwards from the very outset. On 6 September 1939 six of its He 111Hs flew an armed reconnaissance sweep off the Thames Estuary. They sighted nothing, but left much confusion among the defenders in their wake, which resulted in the shooting down of a luckless Hurricane by other RAF Spitfires – an incident that duly entered Fighter Command folklore as the 'Battle of Barking Creek'.

On 25 September I./KG 26 moved up to the Schleswig-Holstein peninsula. Here, together with the first Ju 88s of the newly forming I./KG 30, they provided the nucleus of the bomber force being assembled for operations over the North Sea, that body of water – flanked by the British and Norwegian coastlines, and with the Shetland Islands at its apex – that the Germans called *'das nasse Dreieck'* ('the watery triangle').

Battle was joined almost immediately. On 26 September reconnaissance reported units of the Royal Navy's Home Fleet at sea, and all available Luftwaffe bombers – nine He 111s of 1./KG 26 and four Ju 88s – were sent off to attack them. For the Heinkels the results were not encouraging. Bombing from a height of some 4000 metres, they failed to achieve a single hit. Then the Ju 88s dived on the ships. They were credited with both a direct hit on the battlecruiser HMS *Hood* – in fact, the bomb bounced off the vessel without exploding – and, more controversially, with the 'sinking' of the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal* (see *Osprey Combat Aircraft 17 – Ju 88 Kampfgeschwader on the Western Front* for further details).

The Luftwaffe was able to respond in greater strength when it next sortied against elements of the Home Fleet on 9 October. By this time the campaign in Poland was long over and I./KG 26 had been joined in the west by II. *Gruppe*. In addition, II. and III./LG 1 had

Fresh from operations over Poland, this He 111H of II./KG 26 is having its port oil tank topped up prior to its next North Sea mission

been specially flown in to Neumünster for this one mission. Altogether, 127 He 111s (plus 21 Ju 88s) took off to attack the vessels, but they were thwarted by the weather. Eight-tenths cloud, their bases as low as 400 metres in places, meant that only a small number of bombers found the ships. Not one of the 18 hits claimed actually registered. And, to make matters worse, two Heinkels were forced to land in Denmark and two others were written off in crashes.

Exactly one week later, on 16 October, an He 111 of *Stab* KG 26 flying a reconnaissance sortie off the Firth of Forth reported sighting *Hood* again. A force of Ju 88s was despatched at once, but by the time they reached the Firth the battlecruiser was already in port. The Ju 88s, therefore, had to seek an alternative target for, during the opening weeks of the war in the west, the Luftwaffe – like RAF Bomber Command – was forbidden to attack enemy warships once they had entered harbour.

On the German side, however, this ban was to be unilaterally revoked just two days later by the *Führer's* 'War Directive No 7 for the Conduct of the War against the Western Enemy', dated 18 October, in which he decreed 'The Luftwaffe may also attack English naval units *in naval bases*'.

But the Luftwaffe had pre-empted its leader's decision by a good 24 hours. On 17 October 13 He 111s of KG 26 (and four Ju 88s) had taken off from Westerland on the island of Sylt for the 825 km flight to the Home Fleet's main base at Scapa Flow, in the Orkneys. The target was almost at the limit of the bombers' range, but for once the weather was kind. The sky was almost cloudless as the attackers approached the anchorage – only to find it empty! A U-boat had penetrated Scapa's defences three nights earlier and sunk the battleship HMS *Royal Oak* with heavy loss of life. The Home Fleet had weighed anchor and sailed for the safety of the west coast of Scotland only hours before the arrival of the bombers. The Ju 88s inflicted some damage on the ancient battleship HMS *Iron Duke* that was permanently moored at Scapa as a depot ship, but all that the He 111s had to show for their efforts was the shooting down of a Sea Gladiator that had valiantly tried to engage them.

With the Royal Navy having taken itself out of harm's way, KG 26's He 111s resorted to flying individual armed reconnaissance sweeps of Britain's northeast coast. It was during one such mission, flown over the Firth of Forth on 28 October, that a machine of the *Geschwaderstab* was intercepted and shot down by RAF Spitfires. Despite being badly wounded, the pilot succeeded in crash-landing the bullet-riddled bomber on the slopes of the Lammermuir Hills, south of the Firth. '1H+JA' was the first He 111 to be brought down on British mainland soil, and it yielded a wealth of valuable intelligence.

The Luftwaffe's war against the Royal Navy was not the only North Sea battle being waged. Back in Berlin there had been an almost equally hard fought struggle between

The first He 111 to be brought down on mainland British soil, '1H+JA' of the *Geschwaderstab* KG 26 lies broken-backed on the Lammermuir Hills surrounded by a ring of curious civilian sightseers. The only external point of interest here are the two crosses on each wing . . .

the German navy and air force chiefs for overall command of the maritime aviation forces operating in the area. Grossadmiral Erich Raeder of the Kriegsmarine based his claim on the many coastal units already involved in the campaign. There were nearly a dozen navy-crewed *Staffeln* of torpedo-carrying and minelaying seaplanes and flying boats stationed in the North Sea Frisian Islands.

But Göring was adamant that *all* flying units should come under his control. The matter had finally been settled on 21 October when an order placed X. *Fliegerkorps* – the staff organisation responsible for North Sea operations – under the direct command of the Luftwaffe. One result of the subsequent restructuring of the coastal *Staffeln* was the emergence of new unit *Küstenfliegergruppe* 806, whose two *Staffeln* were initially equipped with the He 111J, a pre-war 'stepped-cockpit' variant of the Heinkel originally designed, but never employed, as a torpedo-bomber.

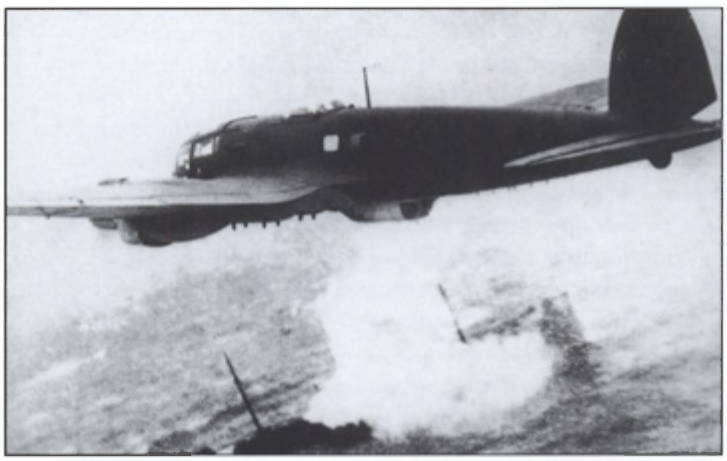
. . . but closer inspection by the professionals revealed a wealth of valuable intelligence, not least the secrets of the machine's radio navigational equipment

On 1 November Göring upped the stakes by giving X. *Fliegerkorps* units free rein to attack 'all convoys, patrol vessels and single merchant ships positively identified as enemy'. Despite the worsening winter weather, the final two months of the year thus saw the *Korps'* Heinkels carry out a number of armed-reconnaissance and anti-shipping sweeps. They produced few results, and commensurately few losses.

On 18 November Ln.Abt. 100, the erstwhile 'signals unit', was redesignated as KGr.100 and added to X. *Fliegerkorps'* order of battle. The *Gruppe's* 'X-*Gerat*' Heinkels flew their first North Sea missions from their home base at Köthen, southwest of Berlin, before transferring to Rotenburg, near Bremen, on 15 December.

By this time Göring had already added to his list of 'legitimate' targets. These now included neutral vessels sailing in an enemy convoy, ships displaying no clearly visible neutral markings and any vessel that opened fire on Luftwaffe aircraft. He also decreed that the Ju 88s of KG 30 were to concentrate on attacking warships, leaving the *Korps'* He 111s to deal with merchant shipping. In one 72-hour period alone, from 17-19 December, the latter sank ten vessels totalling an estimated 3000 tons, most of them fishing trawlers.

An unidentified He 111 carrying out a low-level attack on an unidentified merchant vessel somewhere in the North Sea – a scene enacted on numerous occasions during the harsh winter months of 1939/40



After this flurry of activity a period of relative calm descended over Britain's east coast. It was not until the second week of the New Year that action flared up again.

In the four days from 9-12 January 1940, KG 26's Heinkels were credited with sinking seven ships against the loss of one of their number. They claimed five more vessels on 29 and 30 January, again for a single loss. Altogether, the month's 12 successes represented 24,000 tons of shipping sent to the bottom. And this time most of them were cargo vessels, the largest being the 7216-ton tanker *Voreda.*

On 9 February 1940 another KG 26 machine landed in Scotland after being attacked by Spitfires close to the Firth of Forth. Unlike '1H+JA', however, 5. *Staffel's* '1H+EN' made a near perfect wheels-down landing and survived intact. Dismantled, it is seen here being towed to Turnhouse airfield on the outskirts of Edinburgh, from where it was flown to RAE Farnborough. It was later operated by the RAF's No 1426 (Enemy Aircraft) Flight before finally being destroyed in a crash in November 1943

Further anti-shipping sweeps by KG 26 during the first ten days of February netted the Heinkels a small Norwegian freighter and the trawler *Theresa Boyle*, then the weather closed in again. Despite – or perhaps because of – the poor conditions Oberstleutnant Joachim Stollbrock, *Gruppenkommandeur* of KGr.100, carried out what was described as an '"X-*Gerat*" test flight' over the Thames Estuary on 13 February. Picked up on radar, Stollbrock's '6N+BB' was shot into the sea by Spitfires. Two days later KGr.100 moved from Rotenburg to Lüneburg, where Hauptmann Artur von Casimir was appointed *Kommandeur* in place of the missing Stollbrock.

On 20 February the weather improved sufficiently to allow KG 26 to resume its armed-reconnaissance activities. This promptly led to the sinking of the Royal Navy trawler *Fifeshire* off the Orkneys. Then, on 22 February, Heinkels of KG 26 and KGr.100 set out on their first night operations over the North Sea. There were to be disastrous consequences.

Unknown to KG 26, six German Navy destroyers had also set sail and were heading northwards to engage British vessels reported off the Dogger Bank. Eight He 111s of II./KG 26 sighted the warships and attacked them, scoring a direct hit on the *Leberecht Maass.* Manoeuvring to avoid further damage, both the *Maass* and sister ship *Max Schultz* entered an unplotted British minefield and sank with heavy loss of life.

A court of enquiry attached no blame to the crews of II./KG 26. It was deemed a 'typical and all too common example of interservice non-communication'. The Navy had failed to inform the Luftwaffe in time that a flotilla of friendly destroyers was operating in the area. And when the vessels opened fire on the approaching bombers, the latter were 'justified in assuming them to be hostile and attacking'. Nor was that all. Later that same night an aircraft of 1./KGr.100 returning from a North Sea sweep had been mistaken for an RAF Wellington and shot down by a naval flak battery on the island of Borkum. The judicial outcome of this incident, in which all four crewmen lost their lives, is not known.

Throughout January and February the Heinkels of X. *Fliegerkorps* had been operating along Britain's east coast from the Orkneys down to the Thames Estuary. On 2 March 1940 they ventured into the English Channel for the first time, attacking and badly damaging the 8841-ton passenger steamer *Domala* off the Isle of Wight. Hit by two 250 kg bombs, the vessel was set ablaze, with 'flames leaping to mast height'. Nearly 100 of those on board perished.

Exactly two weeks later, on 16 March, the *Korps'* bombers were back over Scapa Flow (to which some units of the Home Fleet had since returned). But while the Ju 88s of KG 30 attacked the warships in the anchorage, damaging the cruiser HMS *Norfolk*, the Heinkels of I./KG 26 bombed three Orkney airfields with little apparent result.

20 March was to be a day of widespread action for the Heinkels. One of them sank the 5439-ton freighter *Barn Hill* in the English Channel. In the southern half of the North Sea Kü.Fl.Gr.806 lost an He 111J that had been forced to ditch. And machines of I. and II./KG 26 were despatched to the far north to attack a large convoy reported to be between the Shetland and Orkney Islands. This latter operation may well be the one described in the following contemporary account by yet another of the Luftwaffe's seemingly ubiquitous war correspondents;

'The 6. *Staffel* has been at readiness since five o'clock this morning. The aircraft are dispersed about the far perimeter of the field, but they are hidden from view by the heavy snow that has been falling for hours. Here in the readiness room next to the hangar time hangs heavy. Several crewmembers are romping about with the *Staffel* mascot "Spundi", a wire-haired dachshund. Around his neck he wears a thin collar engraved with the Latin inscription *"Vestigium Leonis"*. From it hangs a small red pendant in the shape of a seated lion – the arms of Brunswick. Suddenly the telephone shrills. The *Staffelkapitän* answers it at once. His expression changes. A terse *"Jawohl!"* and he replaces the receiver. Everyone in the room jumps to his feet – things are starting to happen at last!

'Despite the appalling conditions every machine gets safely off the ground. At 1600 hrs we cross the German coast. Surrounded by dense flurries of snow and impenetrable banks of cloud, we catch a brief glimpse of a lighthouse. Angry breakers are dashing themselves to pieces almost halfway up it. Then one or two stretches of turbulent white spray – the last sandbanks – before the water takes on a darker hue and we are out over the open North Sea.

'The whole machine is shaking and juddering. It must be quite a storm out there to be able to toss a large bomber about like a flimsy scrap of paper. We press on through grey walls of cloud that hang down to the sea like heavy curtains. Powerful gusts of wind continue to batter the aircraft. Through the rain-lashed cockpit windows the sea is empty – not a ship, not a mast, not a wisp of smoke to be seen. Instead, just a raging, spume-flecked expanse the colour of steel. Driven by the storm, the clouds are no longer stately solid formations, but scudding livings things, their edges torn and frayed by the howling winds.

'And so it goes on for hour after hour as we fight to hold steady our course towards the Shetland Islands. Just behind and below us our wingman rises and falls as he is buffeted about by the gales. He is tucked in close to our left wing and

Groundcrew struggle in blizzard conditions to prepare an aircraft of KG 26 for yet another North Sea mission

both pilots are having to concentrate hard to make sure that the two machines don't touch.

'Four hours pass. Four long hours of extreme physical and mental exertion. Dusk descends, but now the rays of the setting sun occasionally break through the thick storm clouds, dappling the angry ocean swell in eerie patches of purple light. And then, at last, we spot the dark outline of the Orkneys rising out of the sea ahead of us. We can't be far from our target. Reconnaissance has reported a convoy sailing southwards, and according to our calculations it should be passing through this area now.

'Suddenly, at the same height as us but far off in the distance, two brief white flashes. At first I don't believe the evidence of my own eyes. But the pilot has seen them too. A slight pressure on the stick and the roar of the engines grows louder as we turn on to a new heading.

'For several minutes we see nothing. Then, there they are again: four, five, six of the same short white flashes – but larger now and clearly identifiable as bursts of flak. It must be our comrades. Part of the *Staffel* took off a quarter-of-an-hour before we did, and these fireworks presumably mean that they have already found the enemy.

'We head for the scene of the action at top speed. It's dark in the cockpit now, the only illumination the soft glow of the lights on the instrument panels. Then, without warning, we are bathed in a brilliant white glare as two streams of fire shoot past us. We've been spotted! The pilot hauls the stick back into his stomach and we climb into the clouds. As we prepare ourselves for battle the clouds part again – and there below lies the enemy! It's a fantastic sight – about 25 ships heading southwards at top speed. Against the sombre grey surface of the sea they are nothing more than tiny black shapes, but trailing behind each of them is the matt shimmer of a broad white wake. In the van is a larger vessel, probably a heavy cruiser, while to right and left of the convoy weave five destroyers.

'We quickly decide to attack from astern, the unprotected side of the convoy. We go into a wide sweeping curve. The ships disappear beneath our left wing. Only the reflected flashes of the flak bursts in the clouds around us betray the presence of the enemy. We complete our turn. The same gap in the clouds now lies directly ahead of us again. The bomb aimer is glued to his sight as the convoy slowly unwinds beneath us like a reel of film. Fiery strands of tracer reach up towards us.

'Bombs away! The pilot makes a sharp turn. Pressing my face against the glass of the cockpit window I see the explosions far below.

'As we come in for our second run the convoy is no longer in such good order. The ships have scattered and are steaming in all directions. The cruiser has turned broadside on to us and is letting fly with everything she's got. But this doesn't deter us from dropping our second salvo. The ships' return fire grows less intense. We make four attacks altogether, and in 25 minutes it's all over. Darkness swallows us up as we finally turn away and begin the long flight back to base.'

If the above account *does* describe the events of 20 March, then the writer has failed to mention the fact that the day ended with the loss of Hauptmann Otto Andreas, the *Kapitan* of 6./KG 26 – the very *Staffel* with which he (the correspondent) had been flying.

It was the start of a difficult period for II./KG 26. On 3 April the *Gruppe* lost its *Kommandeur* when a Spitfire shot '1H+AC' into the sea

Despite the atrocious weather of early 1940, the crews of KG 26 obviously retained their sense of humour. This trio are posing with suitably decorated umbrellas addressed to 'Herrn Chamberlain' and 'Mister Churchill'. It would be nice to know if these 'missiles' were actually dropped during their next mission over Britain!

off the coast of Yorkshire. The crew survived the ditching and were taken into captivity. II./KG 26 then lost four of its aircraft during a dusk raid on Scapa Flow five days later.

The latter mission had been carried out in support of the imminent invasions of Denmark and Norway, for Hitler was on the eve of launching Operation *'Weserübung'* ('Weser Exercise'). Within hours German troops were marching into Denmark and landing in Norway. At a stroke, the focus of action had moved from the east coast of Britain to the opposite shores of the North Sea.

In the early hours of 9 April 1940 Denmark was occupied almost 'on the hoof' as German forces surged northwards. Norway was the main prize, and its conquest depended on a series of six near simultaneous air and sea landings along its coastline, from the capital Oslo in the south, to Kristiansand and Stavanger, and thence northwards to Bergen, Trondheim and Narvik. The aerial component of *'Weserübung'* was to be provided by X. *Fliegerkorps*, which had been greatly enlarged for the purpose. Its strength on 9 April included seven Heinkel *Kampfgruppen* – the three North Sea 'veterans' of I. and II./KG 26 and KGr.100, plus the recently formed III./KG 26 and all three *Gruppen* of KG 4.

Preliminary orders called for I./KG 4 to stage demonstration and leaflet-dropping flights over the Danish capital, Copenhagen. At the same time, the *Staffeln* of III./KG 4 were likewise to demonstrate over, and support the German landings at Kristiansand, Stavanger and Bergen. II./KG 4, meanwhile, was to accompany the bulk of the remaining Heinkel *Gruppen* (I. and III./KG 26 and KGr.100) in raids aimed at neutralising the defences guarding the day's primary objectives – the city of Oslo and its airfields.

During these and subsequent missions at least three Heinkels were lost – one each at Oslo, Bergen and Kristiansand. But among the successes was 8./KG 4's sinking of the small Norwegian destroyer *Aeger* off the latter port. In mid-afternoon of 9 April the He 111s and Ju 88s of KGs 26 and 30 also saw action against the Royal Navy. The British had been monitoring events in Scandinavia closely, and when Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft spotted units of the Home Fleet at sea some 200 km to the southwest of Bergen, the 40+ available Heinkels of I. and II./KG 26 were

Two Heinkels that ran out of runway on landing at Oslo/Fornebu – KG 4's '5J+KR' in the foreground, with '1H+ES' of KG 26 behind it

part of the bomber force sent out to attack them. All they achieved was to inflict slight damage on three cruisers.

By the end of the first day of *'Weserübung'* the Germans had attained all their initial objectives. Several Norwegian airfields had already been occupied by Luftwaffe aircraft. Among them were a number of He 111s of I. and III./KG 26, which had landed as ordered at Stavanger-Sola and Oslo-Fornebu respectively. A crew member of one 3. *Staffel* machine jotted down his impressions of the day;

'It is still pitch black outside when we are called to readiness. Everyone, from the *Kommandeur* down to the youngest airman, is fully aware of the enormity of the occasion.

'By the time the initial reports of our troops' marching into Denmark and landing in Norway begin to come in, our first *Ketten* have already been in the air for hours. As they cross the Skagerrak and approach the Norwegian coast they fly over whole flotillas of our Navy racing northwards. At midday the *Kommandeur* takes off with his *Stabskette* and the remaining *Staffeln.* The further we fly the more breathtakingly beautiful the majestic northern landscape becomes. We sweep low over mountains, fjords and small harbour towns. We see numerous merchant ships. In the streets and squares people stare up at our bombers with their unfamiliar black and white markings.

'During our flight over Norway we encounter *Kette* upon *Kette, Staffel* upon *Staffel* of our aircraft both in the air and already on the ground – bombers, Stukas, fighters and reconnaissance machines. We finally land on a field occupied by a *Staffel* of Stukas, comrades-in-arms from the days of the Polish campaign.'

With much of southern Norway firmly secured, German troops began to advance overland towards their bridgehead at Trondheim to the north. The He 111 *Gruppen* would be heavily involved in the support of these ground operations. But, at the same time, the Germans could not afford to ignore their gaping left flank – the wide-open expanse of the North Sea. It was from this direction that any Allied assistance to Norway would inevitably come. A close watch had to be kept on the area. Thus, when an assemblage of shipping was reported off the Orkneys on 10 April, the He 111s of KG 26 and KGr.100 were immediately despatched to investigate. They were intercepted by RAF fighters and among the resulting losses was Oberstleutnant Hans Ahlefeld, *Gruppenkommandeur* of I./KG 26, whose aircraft was shot into the sea by Hurricanes.

To provide extra 'eyes', the He 111s of II. and III./LG 1 – which had flown armed-reconnaissance sweeps over the North Sea during the preceding days – were officially attached to X. *Fliegerkorps* on 12 April.

Despite these precautions, the coming week (when most of the Luftwaffe's airfields in southern Norway were plagued by bad weather) saw the Allies landing as expected at several places along the Norwegian coast. Their obvious intention was to eliminate the German footholds at Trondheim in the centre of the country and at Narvik in the far north.

The Luftwaffe reacted violently, attacking the Allied ships and the troops that they had put ashore. Initially, the main targets for the Heinkels' bombs were the landing areas at Namsos and Aandalsnes, two small harbour towns tucked into fjords to the north and south of Trondheim respectively. The Allied forces had the benefit of some air

cover, both carrier- and land-based, but this was unable to prevent X. *Fliegerkorps'* Heinkels from carrying out a succession of devastating raids. By 20 April Namsos was reported to have been 'almost totally destroyed'.

It was also on 20 April that a tenth He 111 *Kampfgruppe* was added to the *Korps'* strength. Moving up from Varrelbusch, in northwest Germany, to Aalborg, in Denmark, II./KG 54 undertook its first mission – an armed reconnaissance of the Namsos area – the following day. It was not an auspicious start. Four of the *Gruppe's* 17 He 111Ps failed to return to base. They had unknowingly strayed far off course and crossed into Swedish airspace. Three forced-landed (one having been fired upon and damaged by Swedish sea and air defences) and the fourth put down on the Danish island of Bornholm.

The Heinkels (joined by an eleventh and last *Gruppe*, I./LG 1, on 24 April) kept up their unremitting pressure on the Namsos and Aandalsnes areas for the remainder of the month. Among their many targets was Lake Lesjaskog, to the southeast of Aandalsnes, whose frozen surface was being used as a makeshift airfield by RAF Gladiator fighters.

In the face of this constant aerial bombardment, it was clear that the Allied plan to invest Trondheim simultaneously from north and south was doomed to failure. On 28 April the evacuation of the landing forces from Namsos and Aandalsnes began. For the next four days the He 111s concentrated their attacks on shipping lifting troops from the two ports.

The last Allied forces left Aandalsnes on 1 May. Namsos was cleared 24 hours later. 2 May also saw the withdrawal from Norway of the Heinkels of KGs 4, 54 and LG 1. With the danger to Trondheim, and thus to central Norway, averted the final act in the Norwegian drama was about to be played out in the far north, where Anglo-French forces still threatened the vital iron-ore port of Narvik.

Luftwaffe units had been using Trondheim as a base almost from the very start of the campaign. But now the town's Vaernes airfield was hastily enlarged. Trees were felled to build an extended corduroy log runway, which would allow the heavily laden He 111s of I. and III./KG 26 and KGr.100 to lift off for the 800+ km flight north to the Narvik area. For with most of KG 30's Ju 88s also having departed

Although of poor quality, this radio picture clearly shows the unmistakeable shape of an He 111 circling above a burning Norwegian township north of Elverum on the valley road to Trondheim

There was activity on the other side of the North Sea too. This twisted wreckage in a suburban garden is all that remains of KGr.126's '1T+EL', brought down by anti-aircraft fire while on a minelaying mission in the Harwich area. It crashed at Clacton shortly before midnight on 30 April 1940. The resultant explosion completely demolished four houses and damaged nearly 50 more

Norway, it was the Heinkels of these three *Gruppen* – operating under the newly established *Fliegerfuhrer* Trondheim – that would be responsible for the majority of the bombing missions flown by the Luftwaffe during the coming five-week fight for Narvik.

Much of that time was spent searching the fjords for the Allied warships that were supporting the troops ashore. One of the He 111s' first victims was the Polish destroyer *Grom*, sunk by KGr.100 on 4 May. The bombers also provided more direct aid to their own ground forces, as is apparent from the following account;

'The *Gruppenkommandeur's* orders are brief and to the point – "maximum effort against ground targets in the mountains around Narvik!" The aim of the mission is to give support to our hard-pressed mountain troops fighting in the far north.

'The crews climb aboard their machines. The signal for take-off is given and one *Kette* after the other takes to the air. We fly over hills and valleys. Far ahead, the dazzling peaks of the high mountains are brilliant against the blue vault of the sky. We swoop low over gleaming white snowfields and the blue-grey shimmer of glaciers.

'The pilot glances at his watch, the navigator is immersed in his maps and the rear gunners test fire their weapons. Then a steep diving turn down into the next fjord. The sudden plunge into the unknown takes our breath away.

'Twisting and turning, we wind our way westwards between the steep mountains towards the main Ofot Fjord. Suddenly an impossibly sharp curve to the left! There is a whistling in our ears. The left wing is almost brushing the sheer face of the rock. Quite unconcerned, the pilot lifts the machine into a climbing turn. We scan the walls of the fjord. The enemy must be around here somewhere, but we can't see him yet. Our eyes have got to get used to the constantly changing light and shadow.

'Suddenly, we spot some small black dots on a glaring expanse of white. There they are! Enemy ski troops laboriously climbing across a snowfield. A quick reverse of course and seconds later our machine guns are hammering. The tiny figures throw themselves down in the snow as we roar low overhead. We zoom over the ridge and down into the next

Comrades-in-arms – Heinkels of KGr.100 (left) and KG 26 (right and background) dispersed alongside each other on the snowy expanse of Trondheim/Vaernes airfield, circa May 1940

valley. A mountain road snakes its way along the valley floor. It is solid with overloaded trucks and columns of marching men. There is no escape for them. Once again our machine guns do their work.'

It was on 10 May, a day of yet more heavy bombing of the Narvik area by the Heinkels of KG 26, that Hitler unleashed his *Blitzkrieg* in the west. Suddenly, northern Norway had become little more than a sideshow. However, the Allies were still determined to take Narvik, the vital link in the chain of Swedish iron-ore shipments to the Third Reich. More troops were put ashore, and more bombing raids were flown against them. On 15 May machines of I./KG 26 sank the troop transport *Chobry* and damaged the Royal Navy destroyer HMS *Somali.*

Over the next ten days the Heinkels continued to take a heavy toll of Allied ships, culminating in KGr.100's sinking of the anti-aircraft cruiser HMS *Curlew* off Ofot Fjord on 26 May.

Twenty-four hours later Allied forces succeeded in recapturing Narvik from the Germans, but they held the town only long enough to carry out extensive demolition work, their aim being to deny Hitler his precious Swedish iron-ore. And once again the Luftwaffe's He 111s reacted with vigour, attacking warships and land targets alike.

KGr.100 flew its last mission of the Norwegian campaign on 29 May. It was against the landing ground at Skaanland to the northwest of Narvik, and it cost the *Gruppe* its *Kommandeur.* Hauptmann von Casimir's aircraft was brought down by patrolling RAF Hurricanes. The *Gruppenkommandeur* and one of his crew members survived the crash-landing, only to be captured and taken back to Britain as prisoners-of-war. For on 3 June Allied troops began to evacuate Narvik. By the 9th the last of them had departed and Norway's remaining land, sea and air forces – which had fought on until the very end – had little option but to accept surrender terms.

The Heinkel bombers had played an important part in the defeat of Norway; particularly those of KG 26, which had been in action from the first day until the last. Their contribution did not go unrewarded. On 6 April 1940, just prior to the launch of *'Weserübung'*, *Geschwaderkommodore* Oberst Robert Fuchs had become the first member of the Luftwaffe's bomber arm to receive the Knight's Cross (for his 'inspired leadership' during the preceding North Sea anti-shipping operations). Two more Knight's Crosses would be awarded to personnel of KG 26 during the course of the Norwegian campaign, and another two would follow shortly afterwards.

Oberst Robert Fuchs, the *Geschwaderkommodore* of KG 26, was the first member of the Luftwaffe's bomber arm to be awarded the Knight's Cross

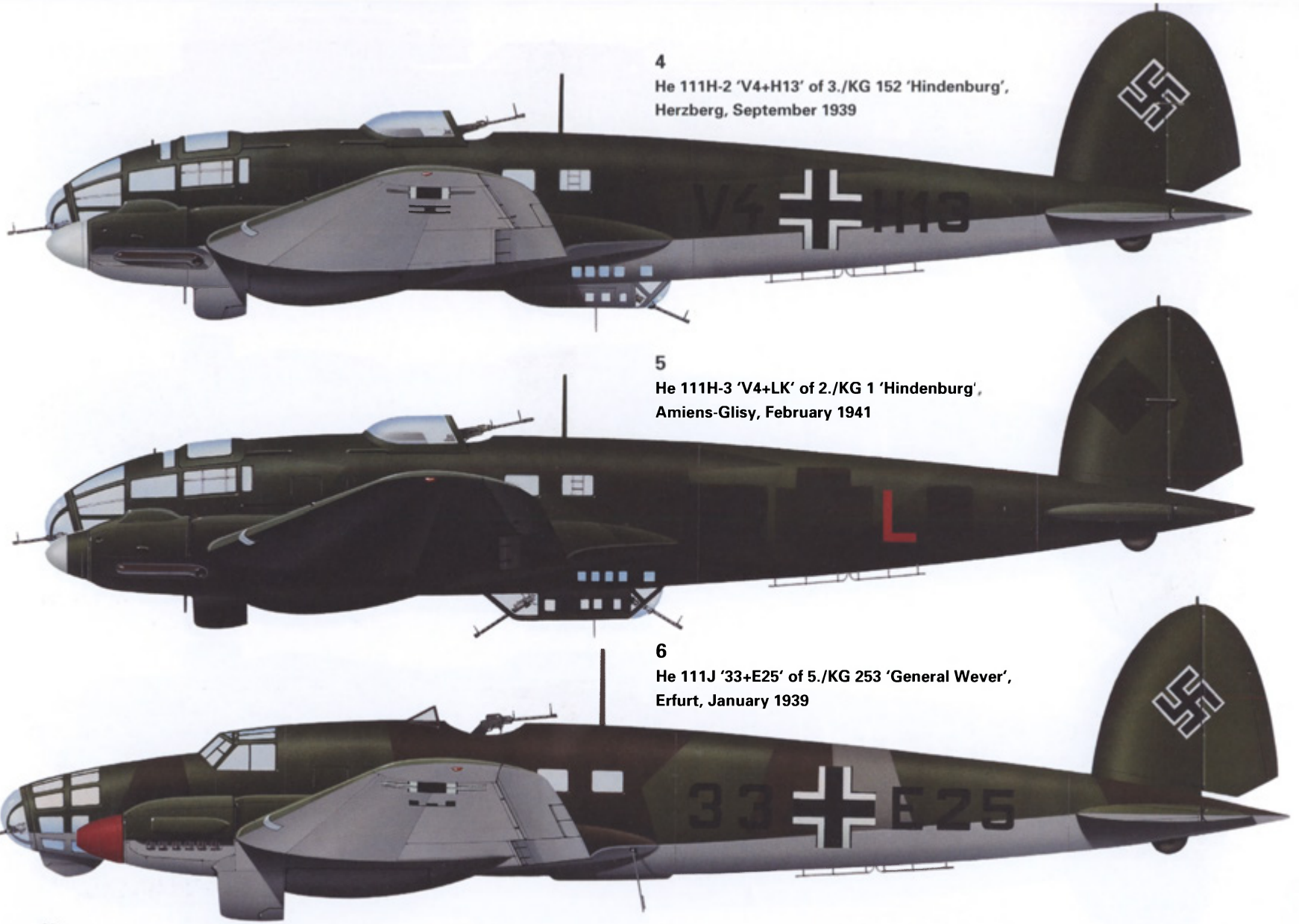
But the 'Watery Triangle' and *'Weserübung'* had cost the *Geschwader* dear. One source states that by June 1940 it had lost more than half of its highly experienced pre-war crews.

COLOUR PLATES

1
He 111B '25.3' of VB/88, *Legion Condor*, Seville, March 1937

2
He 111E '25.81' of 2.K/88, *Legion Condor*, Ebro Front, December 1938

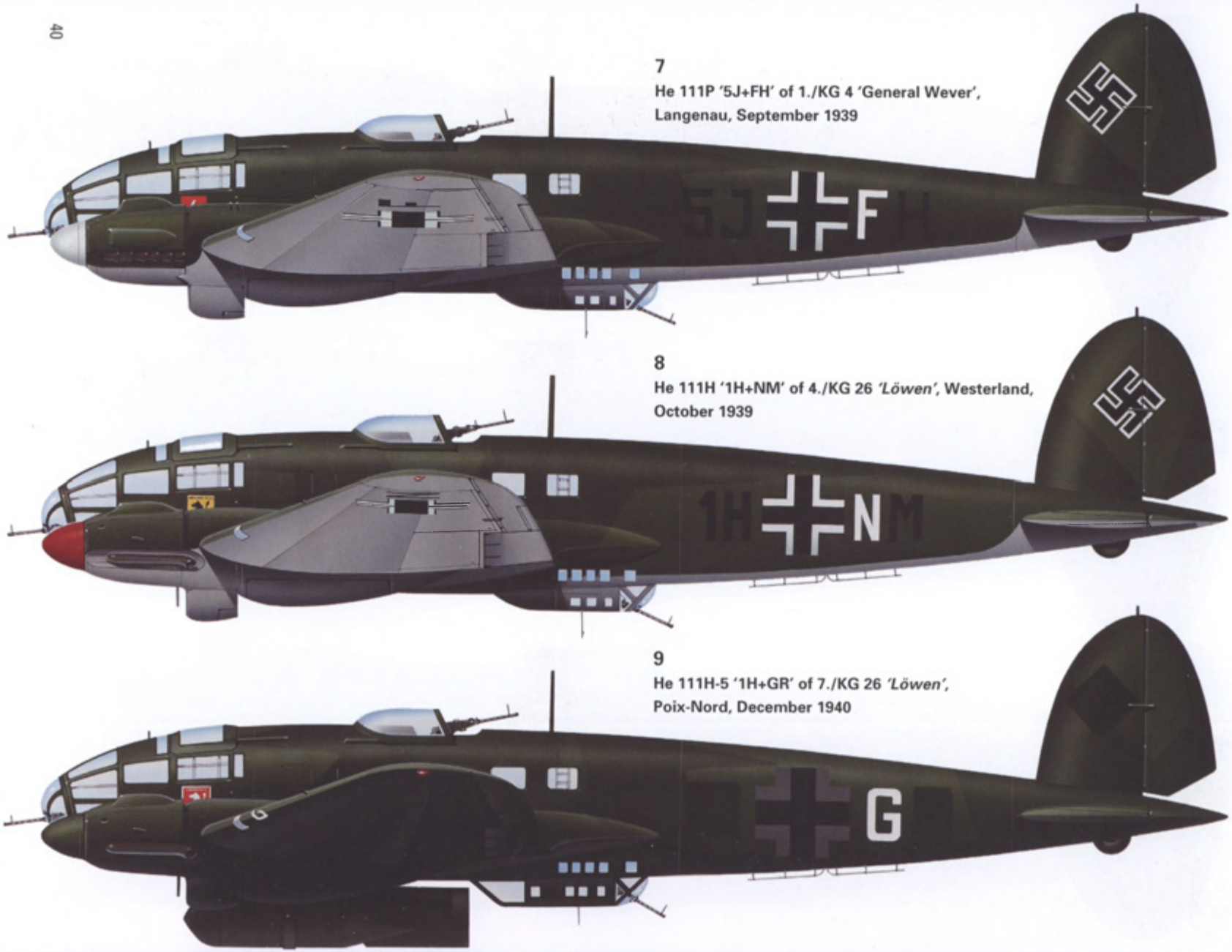
3
He 111E 'V4+AH' of 1./KG 1 'Hindenburg', Kolberg, September 1939



4
He 111H-2 'V4+H13' of 3./KG 152 'Hindenburg', Herzberg, September 1939

5
He 111H-3 'V4+LK' of 2./KG 1 'Hindenburg', Amiens-Glisy, February 1941

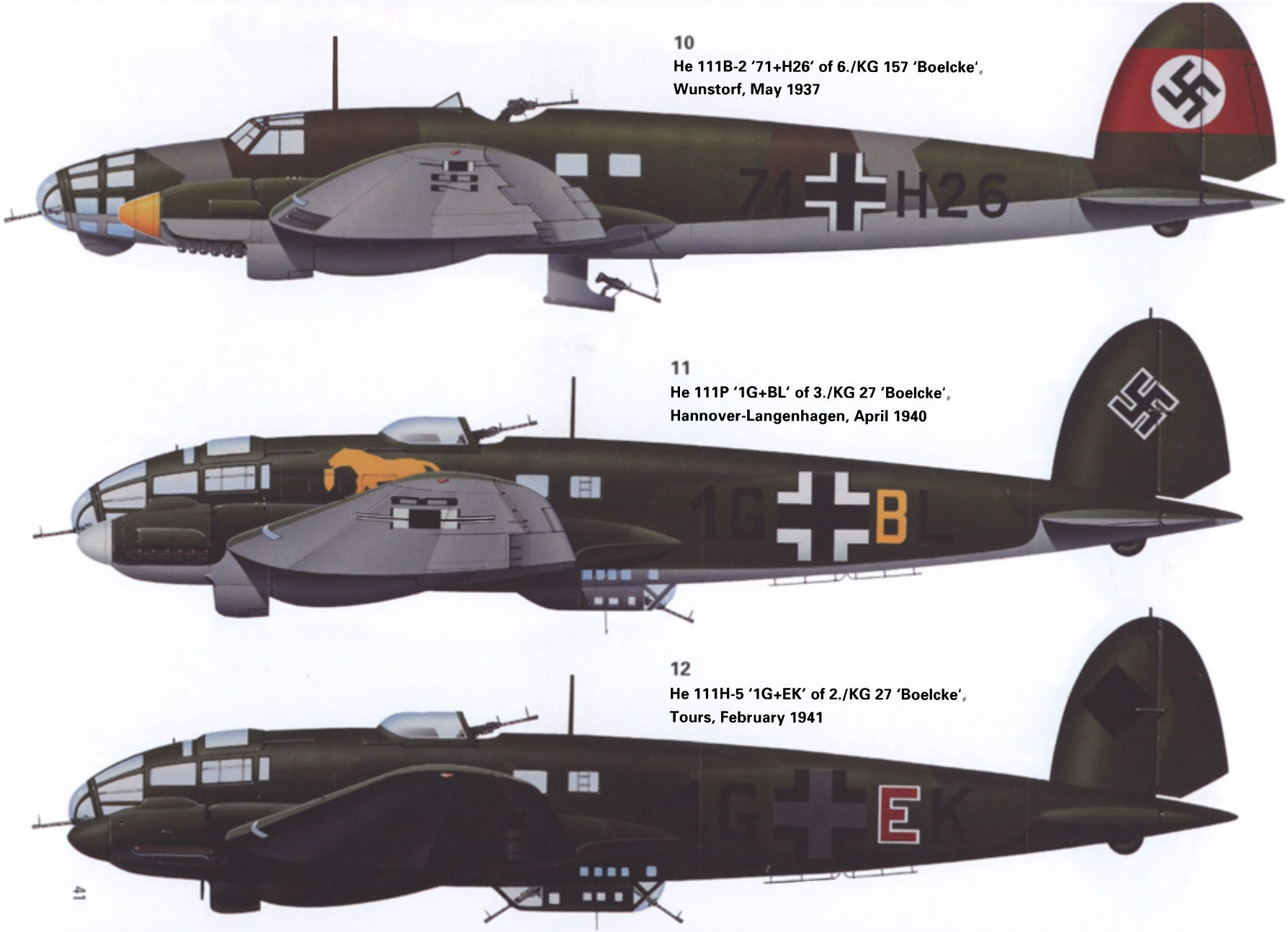
6
He 111J '33+E25' of 5./KG 253 'General Wever', Erfurt, January 1939



7
He 111P '5J+FH' of 1./KG 4 'General Wever',
Langenau, September 1939

8
He 111H '1H+NM' of 4./KG 26 *'Löwen'*, Westerland,
October 1939

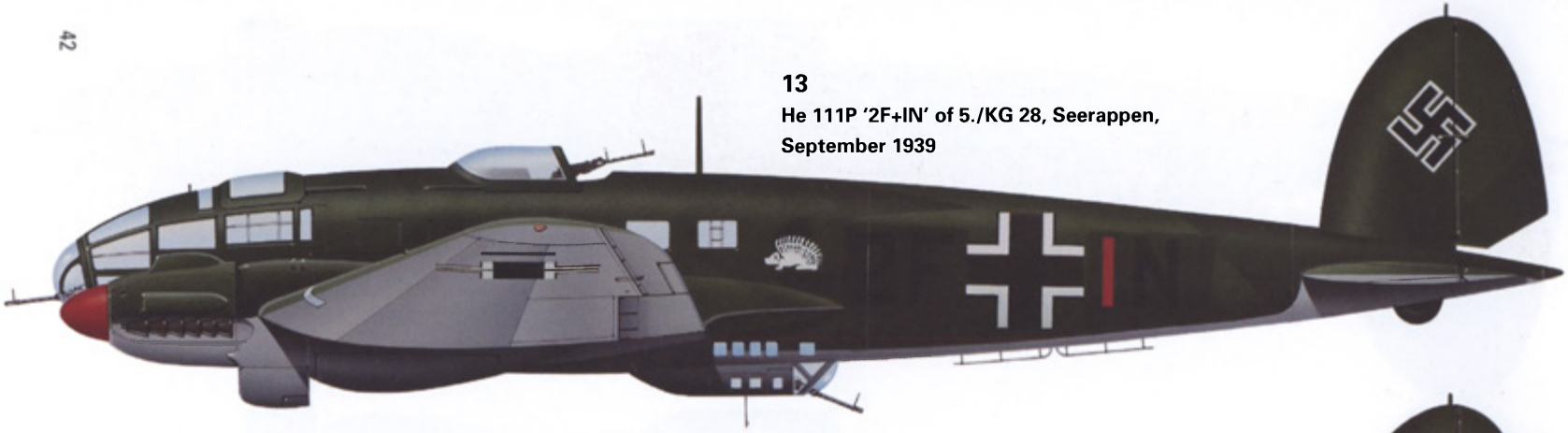
9
He 111H-5 '1H+GR' of 7./KG 26 *'Löwen'*,
Poix-Nord, December 1940



10
He 111B-2 '71+H26' of 6./KG 157 'Boelcke',
Wunstorf, May 1937

11
He 111P '1G+BL' of 3./KG 27 'Boelcke',
Hannover-Langenhagen, April 1940

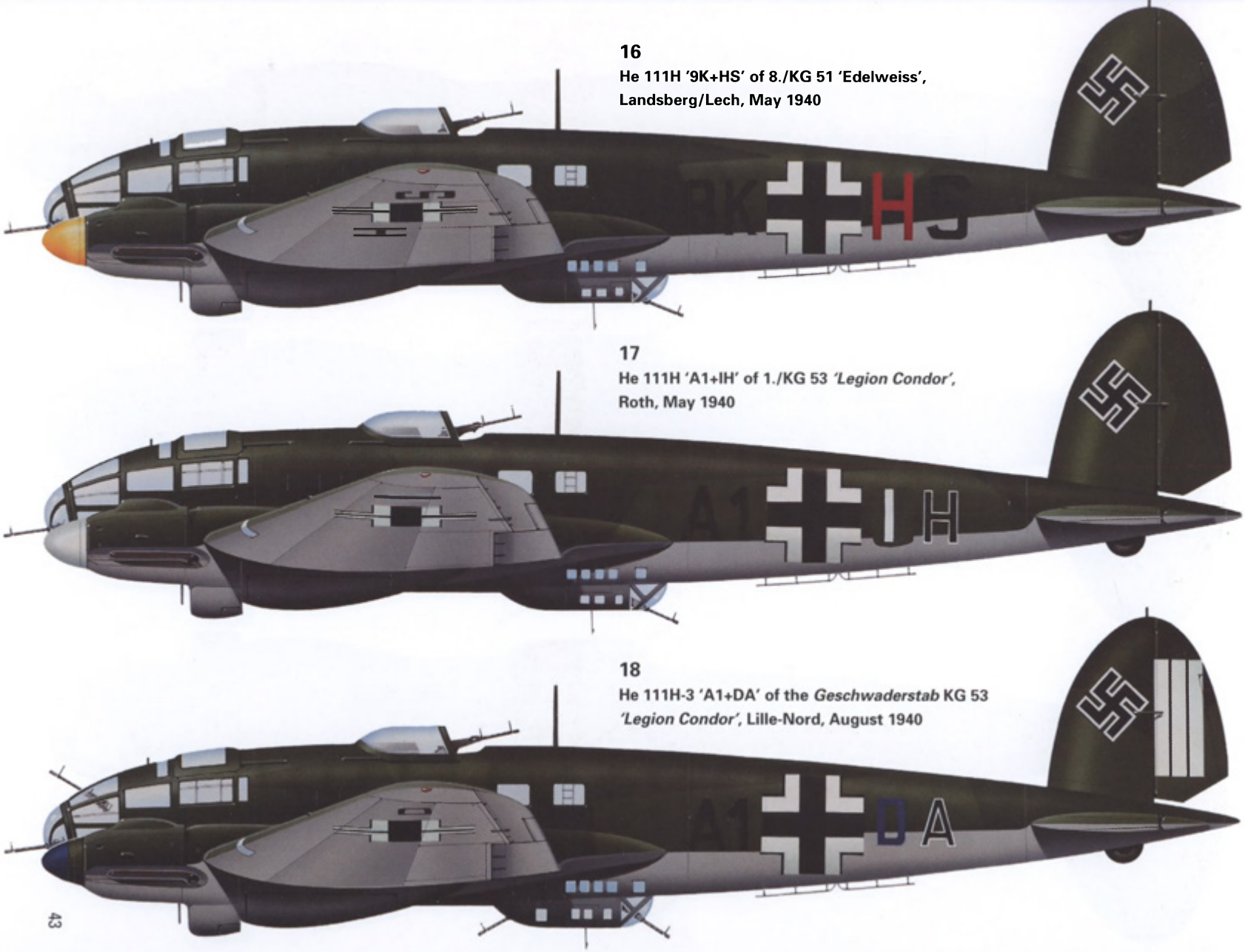
12
He 111H-5 '1G+EK' of 2./KG 27 'Boelcke',
Tours, February 1941



13
He 111P '2F+IN' of 5./KG 28, Seerappen, September 1939

14
He 111H '1T+AL' of 3./KG 28, Brest-Morlaix, January 1941

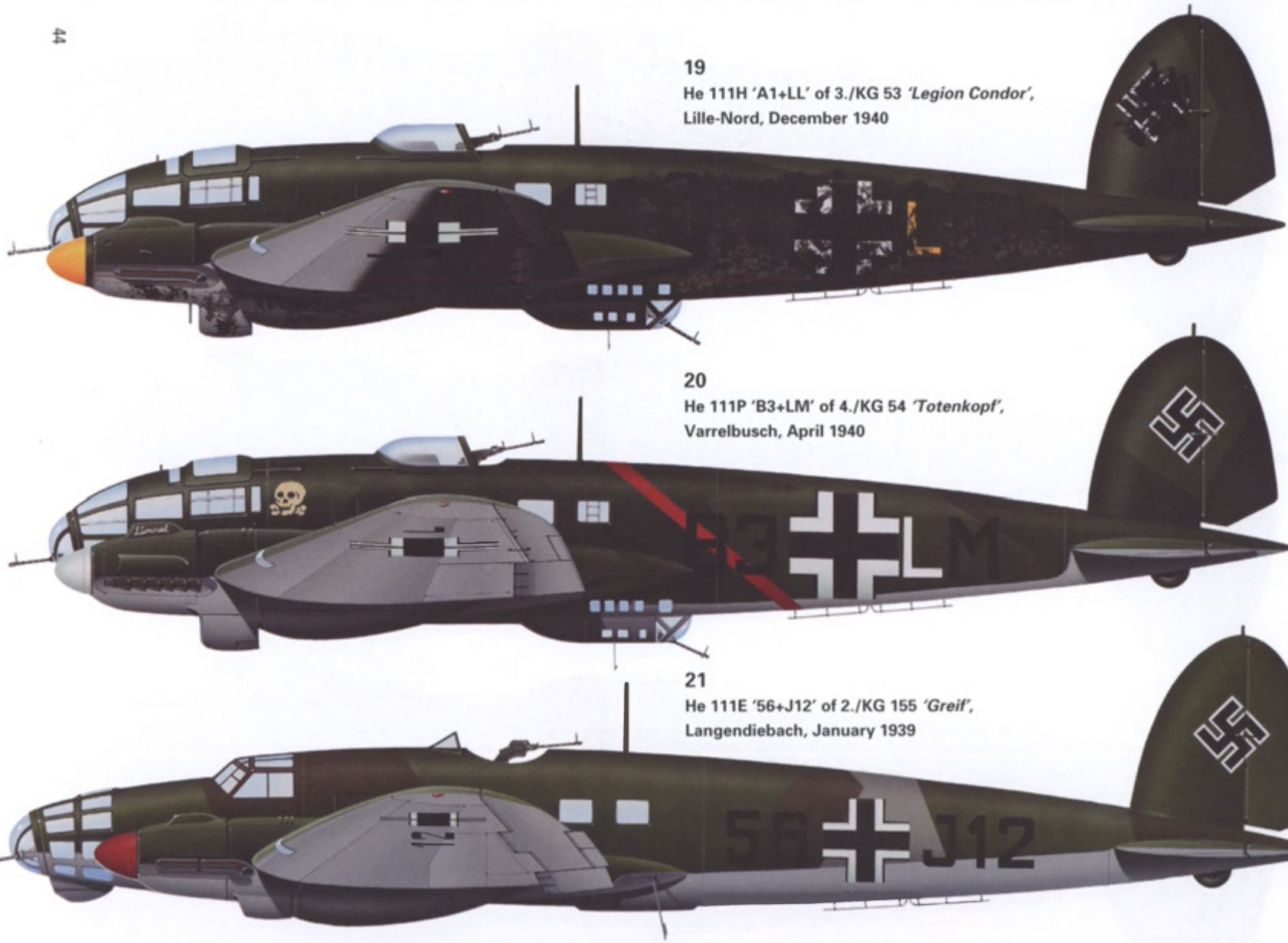
15
He 111H-5 'V4+AK' of 8./KG 40, Brest, May 1941



16
He 111H '9K+HS' of 8./KG 51 'Edelweiss', Landsberg/Lech, May 1940

17
He 111H 'A1+IH' of 1./KG 53 *'Legion Condor'*, Roth, May 1940

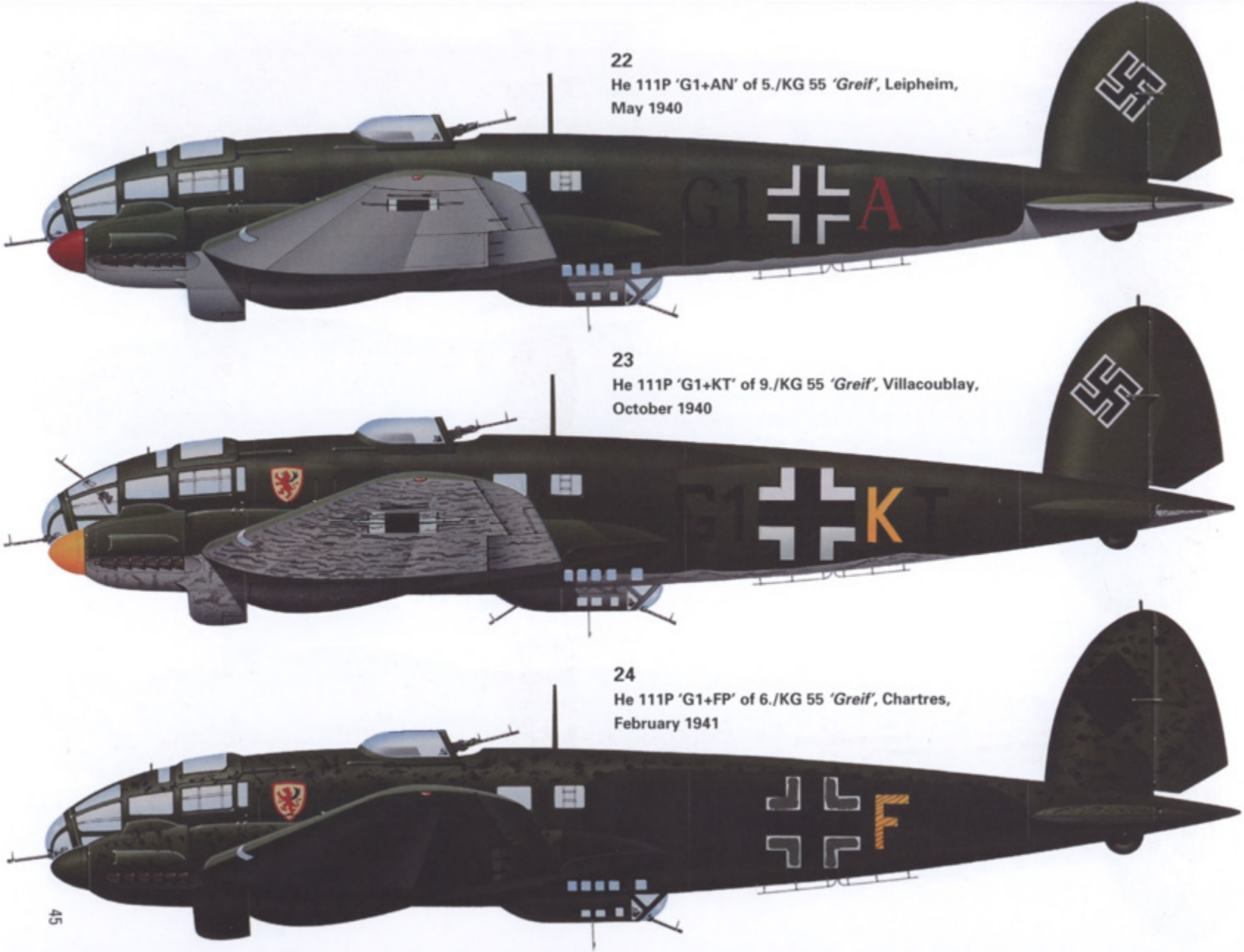
18
He 111H-3 'A1+DA' of the *Geschwaderstab* KG 53 *'Legion Condor'*, Lille-Nord, August 1940



19
He 111H 'A1+LL' of 3./KG 53 *'Legion Condor'*,
Lille-Nord, December 1940

20
He 111P 'B3+LM' of 4./KG 54 *'Totenkopf'*,
Varrelbusch, April 1940

21
He 111E '56+J12' of 2./KG 155 *'Greif'*,
Langendiebach, January 1939

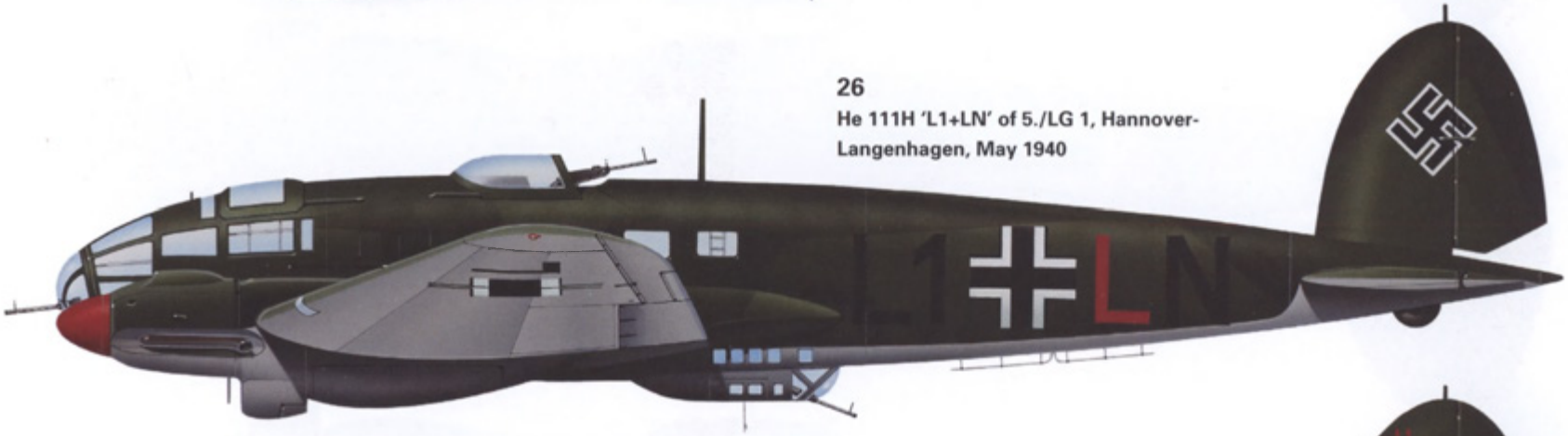


22
He 111P 'G1+AN' of 5./KG 55 *'Greif'*, Leipheim, May 1940

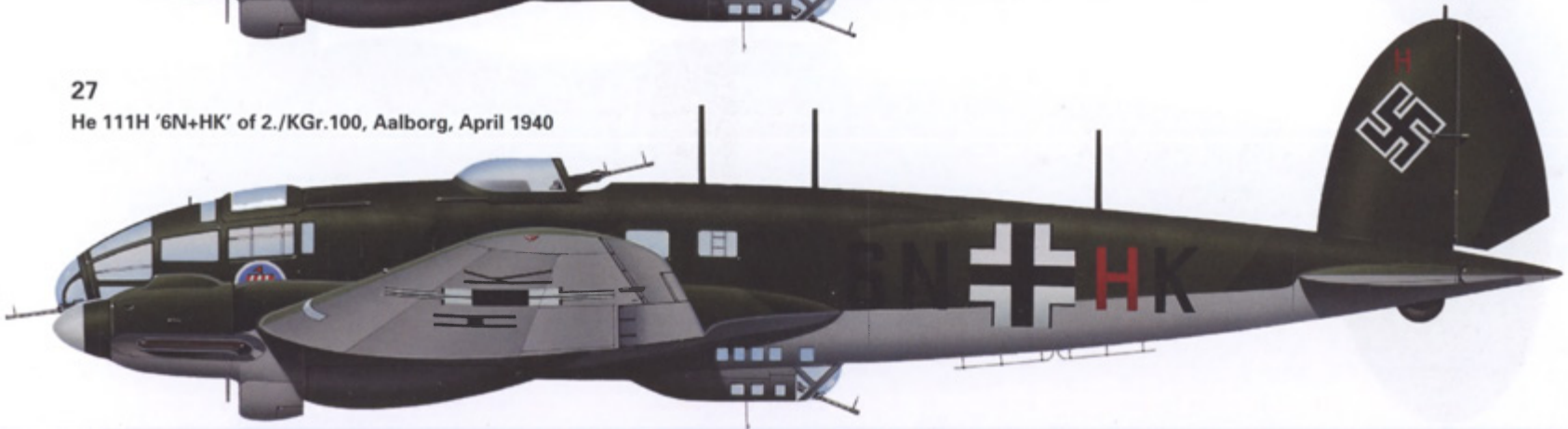
23
He 111P 'G1+KT' of 9./KG 55 *'Greif'*, Villacoublay, October 1940

24
He 111P 'G1+FP' of 6./KG 55 *'Greif'*, Chartres, February 1941

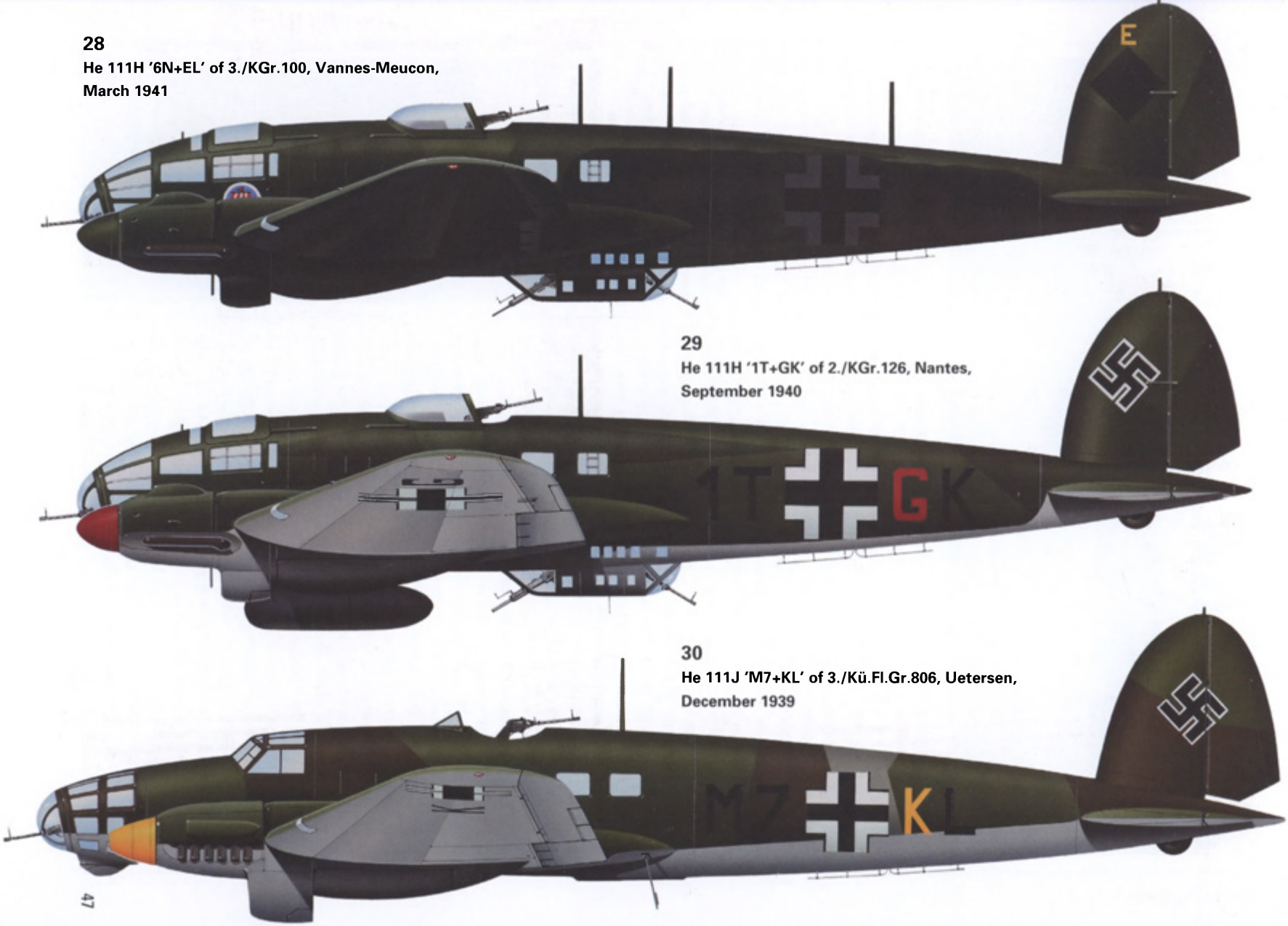
25
He 111B '2L+H31' of 7.(K)/LG 1, Greifswald, May 1937



26
He 111H 'L1+LN' of 5./LG 1, Hannover-Langenhagen, May 1940



27
He 111H '6N+HK' of 2./KGr.100, Aalborg, April 1940



28
He 111H '6N+EL' of 3./KGr.100, Vannes-Meucon, March 1941

29
He 111H '1T+GK' of 2./KGr.126, Nantes, September 1940

30
He 111J 'M7+KL' of 3./Kü.Fl.Gr.806, Uetersen, December 1939

BLITZKRIEG IN THE WEST

After the successful conclusion of the Polish campaign, Hitler transferred the bulk of his armed forces to Germany's western borders with France and the Low Countries. In the seven months from October 1939 to April 1940, however, such was the dearth of military activity in these areas that the period very soon became known as the 'Sitzkrieg' or 'Phoney War'. These derogatory expressions were directed primarily at the conspicuous lack of offensive action on the ground. But they might well be equally applied to the Luftwaffe's bomber arm, for while Göring's fighter and reconnaissance units made regular, albeit limited, contact with the enemy throughout this time, the Heinkel *Kampfgruppen* ventured only occasionally into hostile airspace.

Instead, they utilised the winter hiatus to build up their numbers, to try to put right some of the shortcomings exposed during operations in Poland and, above all, to prepare for the coming confrontation with the Western Allies.

During the course of the 'Phoney War' nine more *Gruppen* of He 111s were added to the 21 that had been on the Luftwaffe's order of battle at the start of hostilities (see Appendix). And to rectify what was now regarded as the Heinkel's 'woefully inadequate' defensive armament, the latest sub-variants of the He 111P/H series currently entering service were equipped with six machine guns – twice the number carried by earlier models. In addition, armour protection for the pilot and for the dorsal and ventral gunners was also introduced.

Despite these measures, the Heinkel's inherently weak armament and armour remained the Achilles' heel that was to see it driven from the skies of Western Europe as a day bomber within a few short months. Indeed, by early 1940 the first He 111 *Kampfgruppen* were already beginning to convert to the Ju 88.

The Luftwaffe lost about 30 He 111 bombers during the 'Phoney War' months, the majority being written off in take-off or landing accidents. Only ten had been involved in operational missions, and in only half of these cases was the loss directly attributable to enemy action.

Seven of the operational casualties were suffered within the space of just one week in November 1939 alone. It was on the morning of 17 November that a dozen aircraft of KG 51 – the *Geschwader* that had converted to the He 111 immediately prior to the outbreak of war – set out on a series of individual long-range leaflet dropping raids. Included among the target areas were the French Mediterranean and Atlantic ports of Marseille, Bordeaux and Brest. And among the leaflets stacked in the machines' vertical bomb magazines were thousands of the decidedly saucy propaganda postcards depicting British soldiers in the company of

The personnel of I./KG 27 whiled away some of their spare time during the 'Phoney War' of winter 1939/40 by decorating their aircraft with a wide variety of elaborate personal markings. This particular example is a tongue-in-cheek reference to Hamburg, presumably the home town of one of the crew

Unlike many of the Heinkels written off in take-off or landing accidents during the seven months of the 'Phoney War', this He 111P – '1G+GH' of 1./KG 27 'Boelcke' – was quickly repaired and returned to service after ploughing through a young birch plantation on 29 March 1940

scantily-clad French females, which the Germans hoped would cause friction and ill-will between the Allied troops.

The meteorologists had forecast perfect conditions for such a mission. Flying above a layer of solid cloud at an altitude of 6000+ metres, the crews could expect to encounter northwesterly winds estimated at 70 km/h maximum. But the 'weather frogs' could not have got it more wrong. Battered by severe storm force winds well in excess of 200 km/h, the Heinkels were blown about all over the sky.

Only one machine managed to reach Bordeaux, returning to base after 'a seven-hour battle with the elements and with fuel tanks almost bone dry'. Another got back despite being damaged by enemy fighters somewhere near Orleans. But three failed to make it. Totally disorientated and driven far off course to the southeast, one had crashed in Austria and one in northern Italy. The crew of the third bailed out over the mountains separating the two countries.

The first He 111 to fall victim to an Allied fighter during the 'Phoney War' on the western front was an aircraft of the *Geschwaderstab* KG 4, sent out on an armed-reconnaissance sortie on 21 November. In fact, it was shot down over the Straits of Dover by a French-based Hurricane of the RAF. And almost exactly five months later, on 20 April 1940, the fifth and final Heinkel combat loss of the 'Phoney War' was another *Geschwaderstab* machine on a similar mission.

KG 1's 'V4+DA' was caught and damaged by French Morane fighters near Maubeuge. It escaped across the border into neutral Belgium, only to be intercepted by Belgian Gladiators before finally crash-landing in Holland! The four-man crew escaped unharmed and were interned, but a war photographer aboard the machine was seriously wounded.

By this time most of the German forces being assembled for the imminent *Blitzkrieg* against France and the Low Countries were in place. The two *Luftflotten* supporting the ground operations included no fewer than 24 Heinkel *Kampfgruppen*. These were divided equally between the two air fleets, 12 under *Luftflotte* 2 control on the northern flank, and 12 assigned to *Luftflotte* 3 to the south.

The *Blitzkrieg* began in tried and tested fashion in the early hours of 10 May 1940 with a series of coordinated strikes on enemy airfields. The raids were widespread, but particularly intense in the Low Countries, where they were timed to coincide with a number of audacious airborne

landings. This was a deliberate ploy by the Germans. Its aim was to draw the Allies out of their fixed positions in northeast France and forward into Belgium, leaving behind them a gap through which the main German offensive – launched from the forests of the Ardennes – could advance to the Channel coast.

It was thus the He 111s of *Luftflotte* 2 that played the pivotal role in the events of 10 May. KG 4 targeted airfields in Holland. I. *Gruppe* lost just one machine to a Dutch fighter during its attacks on Eindhoven, Gilze-Rijen and Ypenburg. But II./KG 4, whose objectives were Schiphol, Soesterberg and Waalhaven, did not fare so well. Having flown a loop over the North Sea, crews found themselves ahead of schedule.

Being under strict orders not to cross the Dutch coast until 0530 hrs, the formation was forced to perform a complete 360-degree turn before heading in over the Hook of Holland. By now it was fully light, and the Heinkels had to run a gauntlet of flak and fighters. Six were downed, including the aircraft of *Geschwaderkommodore* Oberst Martin Fiebig, who was leading the force. Having been awarded the Knight's Cross just 48 hours earlier, Fiebig was to spend several days in Dutch captivity. Shortly after his release he would take up a staff appointment.

Altogether, KG 4 lost ten Heinkels (and five Ju 88s) on 10 May – the highest number of casualties suffered by any He 111 *Kampfgeschwader* on that date. By comparison, KG 27 and LG 1 lost nine and six machines respectively in their attacks on French airfields around Lille and in the Pas-de-Calais. Six aircraft of KG 54 also failed to return on 10 May, but they all came from the same *Staffel*. The eight He 111s of 8./KG 4 were part of a raid on Wevelgem airfield in Belgium that was intercepted by RAF Hurricanes. Only two of the *Staffel's* Heinkels survived the fighters' combined onslaught to make it back damaged to their base at Vechta.

Meanwhile, further to the south, the hardest hit of *Luftflotte* 3's Heinkel *Gruppen* was III./KG 1, six of whose machines were shot down by Allied fighters during an unescorted raid on the Potez aircraft works at Albert and surrounding airfields. Among those killed was *Gruppenkommandeur* Major Otto Schnelle.

One of the six He 111Hs that failed to return to Ettinghausen after a raid on airfields near Albert during the afternoon of 10 May, 9./KG 1's 'V4+DT' – a victim of RAF Hurricanes – lies disconsolately on its belly in a field not far from the target area

III./KG 55 also lost its *Kommandeur*. His was one of the three aircraft brought down by French fighters when the *Gruppe* attacked Nancy-Essay airfield. Major Hans Schemmell survived the belly-landing of 'G1+AD', however, and after a brief spell in French captivity was able to resume command of his unit.

The two remaining *Geschwader*, KGs 51 and 53, lost three aircraft each to a combination of fighters and flak. Weather conditions in the far south were far from good and KG 51 had a particularly hard time. The unit's targets included the French airfields at Lyon-Bron, Dijon and Dole-Tavaux, but in a rerun of the leaflet dropping fiasco of the previous autumn, a number of machines became hopelessly lost. One strayed over Switzerland and was damaged by fire from Swiss Bf 109 fighters. After well over an hour of almost continuous blind-flying, one even more luckless *Kettenführer* of III./KG 51 spotted what he took to be Dole airfield through a gap in the clouds. The leutnant led his three aircraft in a hurried bombing run, but was unable to observe the results. It later transpired that he had bombed Freiburg in southwest Germany, causing considerable loss of civilian life.

The first day of the *Blitzkrieg* in the West had cost *Luftflotten* 2 and 3 well over 50 Heinkel bombers lost or written-off. This represented very nearly ten percent of the air fleets' 588 serviceable machines, and was probably the highest number of casualties in a single day to be suffered by the He 111 units during the course of the entire war. But 10 May's air strikes had achieved their purpose, sowing the seeds of the chaos and confusion that would dog every Allied attempt to halt the German advance throughout the remainder of the campaign.

The overall success of the campaign, however, depended very much on events in the north going strictly to plan. And it was to this end that KG 4's Heinkels spent the next three days supporting the airborne troops' crucial struggle in Holland, not only by bombing Dutch gun batteries and road and rail traffic, but also by flying supply missions, dropping ammunition and other essential stores to their hard-pressed comrades on the ground. As a graphic example of just how quickly the He 111s' fortunes were improving, the Geschwader lost just four machines – three of them in crash-landings – during the whole course of these operations.

One of the last missions undertaken prior to the Dutch capitulation was the controversial bombing of Rotterdam. At 1345 hrs on 14 May about 100 He 111s of KG 54 began to lift off from their bases in northwest Germany. Their reported aim was to relieve the pressure on German airborne troops holding a small bridgehead on the northern bank of the Nieuwe Maas, diagonally across from Waalhaven airfield. But, unknown

A more infamous raid four days later by aircraft of KG 54 tore the historic heart out of the city of Rotterdam. The white area on the northern bank of the winding Nieuwe Maas plainly shows the extent of the devastation

to the Heinkel crews, the Dutch had just reopened negotiations for the surrender of the city. Attempts to recall the bombers by radio proved unsuccessful, as too did the red flares fired from the ground – the pre-arranged signal for an abort – which were all but invisible amid the thick haze and columns of smoke rising into the air.

It was only at the very last moment, quite literally, that the leader of the bombers coming in from the south caught sight of two faint red dots above the south bank of the river. Although it was too late to prevent his own lead *Kette* from releasing its bombs (the automatic mechanism had already been set in motion), he *was* able to order those machines behind him to break off the attack. But there was no such last-minute reprieve from the 50+ Heinkels approaching the target from the east. They saw no flares and bombed as ordered – with devastating results.

Even as KG 54's bombs were laying waste to a large swathe of central Rotterdam, a fierce air battle was raging to the south. Or, to be more precise, a day-long series of separate but violent aerial clashes was taking place. The ground forces forming the real core of the German offensive – the seven Panzer and four mechanised divisions of Army Group 'A' – had debouched from the Ardennes and were about to cross the River Meuse, the one major water barrier blocking their planned route of advance to the English Channel.

Throughout the daylight hours of 14 May British and French bombers strove desperately to destroy the Meuse crossing points, but without success. The Panzers' ensuing dash to the Channel coast, closely supported by 'clouds of Stukas', has since become the very epitome of *Blitzkrieg*. But the Heinkel *Gruppen* provided equally important, if less spectacularly direct, support for the advancing ground units.

From 15 to 20 May the He 111s of *Luftflotte* 3 flew numerous bombing missions ahead of the rampaging Panzers, helping to clear their path from the Meuse to the Oise and beyond. The Heinkels targeted mainly enemy troop concentrations and rear area lines of communication and supply. Their attacks on the railway systems around Amiens and Abbeville, commencing on 18 May, were a key factor in the capture of the two Somme towns, and they paved the way for the final stage of the armoured units' advance to the Channel.

Meanwhile to the north, following the surrender of Holland, the Heinkel *Gruppen* of *Luftflotte* 2 were providing similar support to the three Panzer divisions of Army Group 'B' as they drove west through Belgium. After a number of raids on enemy troop movements and supply columns around Antwerp and Brussels on 16 May, the air fleet's He 111s began to strike at targets in northeast France, including Cambrai and Arras.

Although under intense pressure, Allied fighters were still resisting

Originally captioned in one contemporary German newspaper as 'Luftwaffe bombers leading the way into France', this impressive display of might by KG 55 was more likely to have been a training exercise. For many Heinkel crews the reality of the French campaign was very different . . .

strongly. 19 May was to prove the second most costly day of the campaign for the He 111 units with 25 aircraft lost, 13 of them from the ranks of KG 54 alone.

The *Geschwader's* targets on that date included Allied troop positions between Arras and Lille, the railway line from Arras to Lens and the Lille airfields. But the He 111s were savagely mauled by elements of no fewer than eight RAF Hurricane squadrons. The *Geschwaderstab* lost three machines, including the *Kommodore's* 'B3+AA'. Despite being wounded, both Oberst Walter Lackner and his adjutant, Oberleutnant Heinrich Howe, managed to bail out. However, *Geschwader* communications officer Oberleutnant Rolf Sandstede and three crewmen were killed when the aircraft crashed to the southeast of Lille.

. . . as witness the sorry state of this unidentified He 111P, purportedly one of the 25 Heinkels lost during the heavy fighting of 19 May

Luftflotte 2's Heinkels had also been attacking shipping in the Belgian and French Channel ports for several days past. When it became clear that the British were falling back on Dunkirk and preparing to evacuate, this one small harbour town became the single most important objective of all. Göring assured Hitler that 'his' Luftwaffe could stop the evacuation in its tracks, and the He 111s of *Luftflotten* 2 and 3 were part of the force he unleashed on Dunkirk to make good that boast. A war correspondent was aboard one of them;

'This afternoon's mission against Dunkirk puts all our previous operations in the shade! An absolute armada of aircraft fills the sky! *Gruppe* after *Gruppe*, *Staffel* after *Staffel*, so tightly packed that their wingtips seem almost to be touching. Shoals of small black dots as far as the eye can see!

'We overfly Roermond and St Trond. Bathed in the sunlight of a warm spring day, a veil of mist hangs heavily in the sky. Then, just as we are approaching the leading spearheads of our ground troops, we are swallowed up by a dense wall of cloud. But within minutes we break through into clear blue sky again. The sun shines brightly on the pocket handkerchief-sized fields far below and a stiff coastal breeze sends scraps of white cumulus scurrying busily across our path. But now the calm before the storm is about to be broken. Near Courtrai the first of the enemy's light flak batteries open up at us. Over Iseghem the fire gets heavier, and continues to increase steadily the nearer we get to Dunkirk.

'The coast appears as a shimmering grey-blue strip along the horizon. The sky is changing from a light pastel blue into a steely grey, tinged with red low in the west. Heavy flak is now hammering away at us. Dirty smudges of black smoke hang limp in the sky like burst balloons. At times they seem to stretch for kilometres in two parallel lines ahead of us like some spectral aerial highway pointing in the direction of Dunkirk. But our formation doesn't deviate a degree from its set course. The two other aircraft of our *Kette* stick to either side of us like glue. Staring grimly at me from their flanks is the *Geschwader* badge – the death's-head skull.

'The dark silhouette of the Channel town that is our objective is growing larger. The enemy flak is now heavy and continuous. Sometimes the explosions are so close that they can be heard above the noise of the engines, and the machine bucks as if shaken by a violent gust of wind. The first waves of aircraft have already dropped their bombs and are just turning away out over the coast. Now it's our turn!

'From the harbour five or six destroyers are hurriedly putting out to sea. They twist and turn frenziedly like fish in a barrel when a hand reaches in to grab one of them. The first bombs tumble from the leading machine of our formation. The bright flash of explosions and then smoke starts to coil upwards from the dock area of the town. Two bombs fall into the water close alongside the quay, producing huge fountains of spray. The third hits a loading ramp, sending bricks and dust flying high into the air.

'The north mole receives a direct hit. The Guillaine lock gates are damaged and water pours into the dock basin. Part of the "Quatre Ecluses" pumping station collapses like a house of cards. From one of the large oil tanks a thin needle of flame blowtorches upwards like a glowing red lance. A black-grey pall of smoke begins to darken the sky above Dunkirk as the last wave of bombers completes its run.

'Then, suddenly, something we've been expecting for many minutes now – enemy fighters! They turn up several hundred seconds too late to interfere with our attack on Dunkirk. But it's the moment our own escorting fighters, who have been providing an unseen protective umbrella high above us, have been waiting for. They swoop down at high speed, positioning themselves between us and the enemy. The Spitfires and Moranes break and scatter, some making steep climbing turns, others diving away hundreds of metres below.

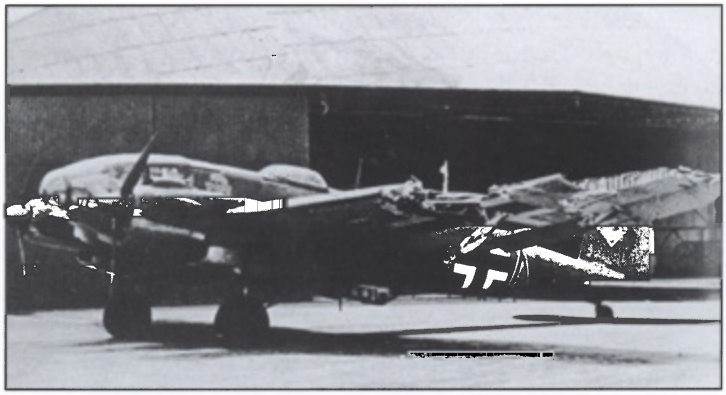
'The sky around us erupts into a wild *mêlée* of fierce dogfights. Locked in individual combat, both sides display the same bitter determination. Shiny olive-green Moranes and darker hued Messerschmitts fling themselves about, each trying to get on the others' tails. Their brief bursts of fire hang suspended in the still air like twisted strands of greying hair.

'Several of the enemy fighters curve away in wide turns before boring in again to attack our flanks from diagonally ahead. Machine guns chatter from the outermost bombers. A couple of them begin to stream white banners of smoke. One aircraft of the leading *Kette* tips lazily over onto its right wing. Close alongside it a small bundle tumbles through the sky – a crewman falling to earth. So much is happening all at once that it is practically impossible to take it all in. But a few hundred metres away a German *Zerstörer* has crept up behind an unsuspecting Spitfire. A few seconds later and the Engländer is swaying in his parachute.

'It's all over as quickly as it began. The enemy fighters disappear as if by magic. As we set course for base the sky behind us is empty again – empty, except for the ever growing cloud of oily black smoke rising over Dunkirk.'

More than 20 He 111s were lost in action over and around Dunkirk during the nine days of the evacuation, but they failed even to disrupt, let alone prevent, the operation. The defeat of Allied forces in Belgium and northeast France was only the first part of the *Blitzkrieg*, however. There still remained the bulk of the French armies to the south and west.

True to form, the second phase of the battle also opened with large-scale raids on the enemy's air force. But 3 June's Operation *'Paula'* was directed solely at French airfields, aircraft factories and associated targets in the Greater Paris area. Heinkels from KG 4 formed part of the attacking force. Aboard one of its machines was another war correspondent;



Many more machines limped back to base with varying degrees of combat damage. 5./KG 54's 'B3+AN' was lucky to make it with the bomber's port wing in this condition – or was this perhaps the result of a nasty ground accident?

'After our decisive support of the ground troops in Flanders and Artois, followed by our devastating attacks on the remnants of the retreating British continental army, the time has finally come for military objectives around the French capital – above all the enemy's airfields and aircraft works – to feel the weight of our bombs.

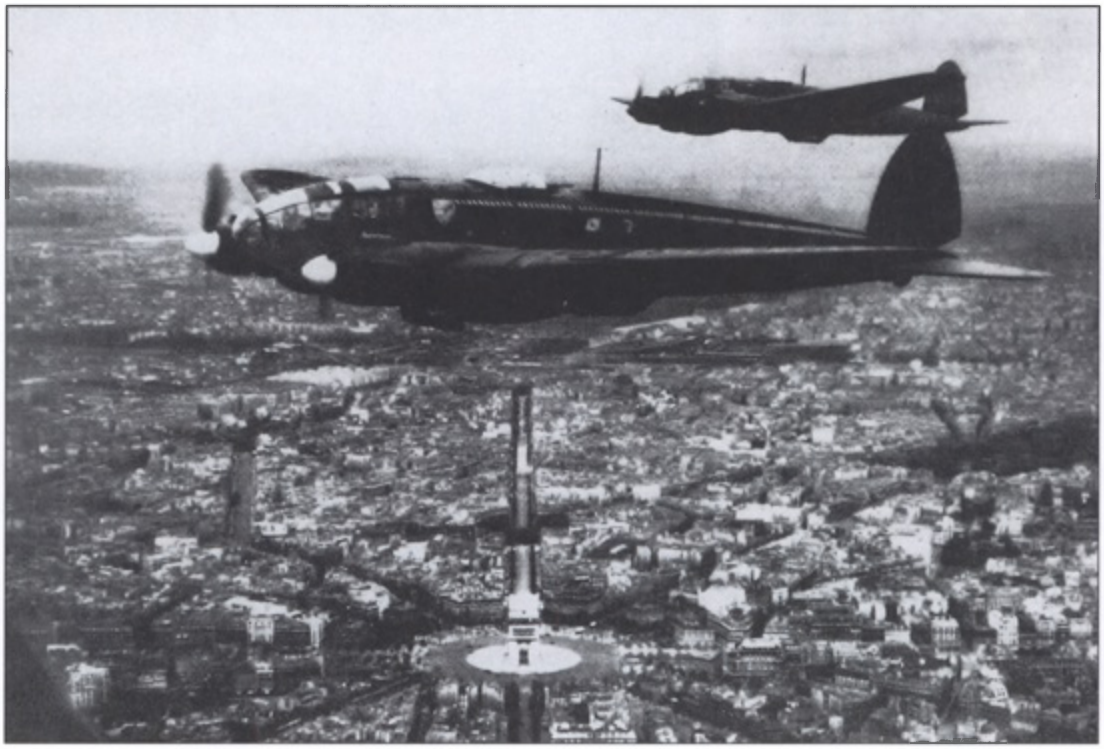
'Our unit's specific target is the airfield at Le Bourget, a few kilometres to the northeast of Paris. Familiar to all pre-war visitors to the city on the Seine as Air France's largest airport and "The Tempelhof of Paris", Le Bourget has been expanded even more since the start of the war to become one of the strongest and most important French Air Force bases in all of central France. Barracks, maintenance facilities, hangars, armouries, workshops and fuel depots have all been added around the perimeter of the base, which now extends to the very edges of the suburb of Le Bourget with its many fashionable villas and gardens. And from here a broad avenue leads directly into the heart of the city.

'We are only a few minutes from our target now. Overhead, formations of fighters and *Zerstörer* weave tirelessly back and forth, providing a protective screen. This is how the infantry must feel when they go into battle supported by tanks. Despite our great height we can easily distinguish the many roads below, all of which seem to be converging on the French capital. The fields are plainly visible too, with here and there the clustered roofs of small hamlets and even individual farmhouses.

'There are a few scattered white clouds, but above us the blue vault of the sky is as large as the dome of a cathedral. Expectantly, we wait for the first signs of defending French fighters. Nothing. Our bombers continue to parade undisturbed across the sky as if staging a flypast at some peacetime international air display.

'Then the first flak comes up to greet us. Flickering red flashes on the ground below, followed seconds later by the dirty black smudges of exploding shells staining one of the white pillows of cloud nearby. We must be almost over Le Bourget by now. Bombs are falling away from the machines in the leading wave. A moment later the airfield comes into view beneath us – that broad expanse of grass where, 13 years ago, Charles Lindbergh made aviation history by landing after his pioneering solo transatlantic flight.

'Within the space of just a few minutes a veritable hail of bombs descends on this major French air base. Thick fountains of dust, dirt and flame rise into the air. Blazing fireballs erupt and sooty black clouds of smoke begin to obscure the buildings on the edge of the field. Over on



Clearly not taken during Operation *'Paula'*, these two aircraft of KG 55 are pictured over the Arc de Triomphe sometime after the surrender of Paris

the far side three or four tiny shapes are racing swiftly across the ground. – enemy fighters taking off! Several of our own fighters dive past us, but we don't see the outcome. Our bombs are gone and we are too busy watching out for the flak, some of which is now bursting uncomfortably close alongside or behind our machines. Although heavy, the fire seems erratic. The French gunners have an impossible task. Not just one target to concentrate on and aim at, but a whole flying army. The sky is a confusion of several hundred targets.

'Paris slides by on our right. The city is shrouded in a thick haze, out of which protrudes a forest of towers, spires and cupolas. That white edifice up on the hill must be the Sacré-Coeur. And that angular latticework silhouette is unmistakably the Eiffel Tower. The Seine winds its way through the heart of the city like a sparkling silver question mark. The broad white avenues give way to the green-grey kaleidoscope of the southern suburbs as a few last ineffective bursts of flak see us on our way.'

Incredibly, not one Heinkel was lost on this 3 June. But it was a different story two days later when German forces launched their ground offensive southwards across the Somme. On the 5th five aircraft of I./KG 27 fell victim to French and British fighters during a raid on Rouen, and four of KG 55's

The *Blitzkrieg* in the west was a costly swansong for the Heinkels of KG 54. The unit lost close on 50 of its number before re-equipping with Ju 88s prior to the start of the Battle of Britain

machines failed to return from attacks on the French airfields at Châteauroux and Nevers.

The geographical distance between the above targets shows that, after briefly combining forces against Dunkirk, the two air fleets were once again operating over separate sectors, with *Luftflotte* 2 supporting troops advancing west along the Channel coast region, through Normandy to the Atlantic, and *Luftflotte* 3 covering the push south towards the Swiss border and the Mediterranean.

Hard hit as the Heinkels were in France, the bombers of the RAF suffered even more grievously. Here, the remains of a burnt out Blenheim IV of No 139 Sqn litter the foreground as the machines of I./KG 27 take a breather between missions

With movement on the ground now very fluid, the Heinkels of both air fleets were employed primarily on longer-range bombing missions during the closing stages of the campaign against France. And casualty returns would seem to suggest that the *Gruppen* of *Luftflotte* 3 in the south had the harder time of it. They lost 17 machines in the final two weeks of operations, as compared to *Luftflotte* 2's six. And half of those latter six casualties were suffered on the same day, 12 June, when the luckless *Geschwaderstab* KG 54 again lost three of its number to RAF Hurricanes, this time over Le Havre.

The last Heinkel combat casualties of all during the *Blitzkrieg* in the West were a pair of III./KG 1 machines that succumbed to French fighters during a raid on oil refineries north of Bordeaux on 20 June.

The defeat of France in little more than six weeks was another staggering feat of arms by the forces of the Third Reich. The Heinkel bombers had been an integral part of that success, and they had emerged from the fighting with their reputation intact – just. True, they had been opposed by the best fighters that the Western Allies possessed. But the effectiveness of those fighters had often been blunted by the growing disruption and disorganisation on the ground as the military situation worsened. Even so, nearly 300 He 111s had been lost or written-off since 10 May, and many more had been damaged.

The Heinkels had clearly paid a heavy price in France. The next campaign that awaited them, one that would take them over the British Isles, was to be very different, however. There would be no armies in the field to support. Their role would be purely strategic. How would they fare against an enemy ensconced behind fixed defences and not in full retreat?

A foray over eastern England by machines of KG 4 on the night of 18/19 June had already offered something of a clue. Six aircraft had reportedly failed to return, and of those that did two had sustained severe damage. It did not bode well!

Even before the Battle of France had run its full course, the Luftwaffe was beginning to venture over Britain. This is all that was left of '5J+AM' – one of the six machines of KG 4 that failed to return from a raid on eastern England during the night of 18/19 June – after it had crashed into a Cambridgeshire field

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

The raid by some 70 Heinkels along England's eastern coastal regions during the night of 18/19 June 1940 – by far the largest air assault on the United Kingdom to date – did not signify the start of the Battle of Britain proper. It was very much a one-off mission carried out in accordance with the *Führer's* wishes and staged solely as an act of retaliation for the RAF's recent bombing of Germany (Bomber Command had despatched almost 100 aircraft against a range of targets in the Ruhr area on the night of 15/16 May).

As a consequence of this, Hitler's War Directive No 13, dated 24 May 1940, in which he set out his plans for the second phase of the French campaign, also included the following among the Luftwaffe's tasks;

'Apart from operations in France, the Luftwaffe is authorised to attack the English homeland in the fullest manner as soon as sufficient forces are available. This attack will be opened by an annihilating reprisal for attacks on the Ruhr. The Luftwaffe Commander-in-Chief will designate targets. The time and plan for this attack are to be reported to me'.

On 18 June, although the cease-fire in France was still six days away, Göring decided that the time was ripe to accede to his *Führer's* demands. The unit he selected to carry out the operation was KG 4. But the result was hardly the 'annihilating reprisal' that Hitler had called for. The *Geschwader* scattered its bombs down the length of eastern England from Yorkshire to Kent. Military damage was slight, one missile falling on an RAF airfield and another starting a small fire in an oil depot. To make matters worse, six Heinkels failed to return from their night's labours.

Over the course of the next three weeks nine more He 111s would be lost in a series of much smaller, almost desultory raids on a number of targets around Britain's coastline. During this time the Battle of France had come to an end. The Germans, however, seemed to be in no particular hurry to embark upon a Battle of Britain. Hitler himself was clearly reluctant to initiate a cross-Channel invasion. He even went to the extent of offering a 'last appeal to reason', urging the British Government to agree to peace terms. However, when this feeler was rejected out of hand by recently appointed Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the *Führer* was left with little option but to start gathering his forces for the coming confrontation.

Another of the six casualties suffered by KG 4 on the night of 18/19 June 1940, the slowly disintegrating wreckage of '5J+DM' lay in the shallows off the Norfolk coast for more than 20 years after the end of the war

For *Luftflotten* 2 and 3 (the two air fleets that would bear the main burden of the Battle of Britain), this entailed the transfer of units forward into the occupied Low Countries and northern France – a process that had already been set in motion prior to the French surrender. They were to be deployed in the same manner as they had been during the recent *Blitzkrieg* in the West, with *Luftflotte* 2 remaining on the right-hand (now eastern) flank, occupying bases in Holland, Belgium and northeastern France roughly to the line of the River Seine, and *Luftflotte* 3 taking up station on the left with its units based to the west of Paris and along the Normandy and Brittany coasts.

The number of Heinkel *Kampfgruppen* in the two air fleets was now far fewer than it had been at the start of the campaign against France two months earlier (from 24 down to 16 and falling). This was due in part to reorganisation, but mostly as a result of the ongoing conversion of the Luftwaffe's bomber arm to the Ju 88. Three *Kampfgeschwader*, LG 1 and KGs 51 and 54, were all but fully re-equipped, and several other *Gruppen* – among them III./KG 1 and III./KG 4 – were following suit.

The Battle of Britain was, in effect, to be the swansong of the He 111 as a daylight bomber over Western Europe. In just five short years the machine that had been lauded as 'one of the most outstanding warplanes of the mid-1930s' had been overtaken by events – or, more accurately, by a succession of opponents each more dangerous and lethal than the last. Just as the Russian *Ratas* had forced early He 111Bs to operate by night over Spain, so now Hurricanes and Spitfires of RAF Fighter Command – backed up by the incalculable benefit of radar – were to compel the latest He 111P/H variants to do the same over Great Britain.

During the course of the coming battle further efforts would be made to upgrade the Heinkel's defensive armament. On some aircraft the nose machine gun was replaced by a heavier-hitting 20 mm cannon. And a few even experimented with a remotely controlled machine gun mounted in the extreme tail. But this was mere tinkering. The Luftwaffe's reliance on hand-operated defensive weaponry for its bombers was the Heinkel's ultimate undoing. It rendered it very vulnerable, as its speed alone was no longer sufficient to allow it to escape British fighters. By contrast, the Ju 88, which initially had only three machine guns to the Heinkel's five or six, was a more manoeuvrable machine and a good 50 km/h faster.

In an attempt to render the He 111 less vulnerable to attack from astern, some machines – such as the anonymous H-6 pictured here – had a remotely controlled rearward-firing 7.9 mm MG 17 machine gun mounted in the tail cone

Yet, surprisingly, over the next four months the losses sustained by Heinkel and Junkers units would be almost on a par. The one big difference was that on a number of occasions during the Battle Ju 88s (and the Do 17s, which were present in far fewer numbers) suffered disastrously high casualty figures in a single day's action, whereas He 111 *Gruppen* – with one striking exception – were subjected to a slow but steady rate of attrition. On only three days did Heinkel combat losses just creep into double figures.

From the defenders' viewpoint the 'official' Battle of Britain began on 10 July 1940. And if that premise is accepted, then the campaign's first Heinkel victim was the machine of 7./KG 53 commanded by Leutnant Konrad Kupfer that was shot down by Hurricanes during an armed-reconnaissance mission along the East Anglian coast on that date.

The first phase of the Battle was aimed at closing the Channel to British shipping. A special mixed force of Do 17 bombers and Ju 87

Stukas was set up for the purpose. The Heinkels, however, were not directly involved in these early anti-convoy operations, being employed instead on continued armed reconnaissance sweeps along Britain's southern and eastern coasts, and in small-scale raids on the major ports in those areas. It was during one such attack by a dozen He 111s on Portsmouth on 11 July that two of 2./KG 55's machines were shot down by Hurricanes (although some sources suggest that one of the bombers exploded in mid-air and took the other down with it). A pair of KG 1 aircraft was also lost on this same day.

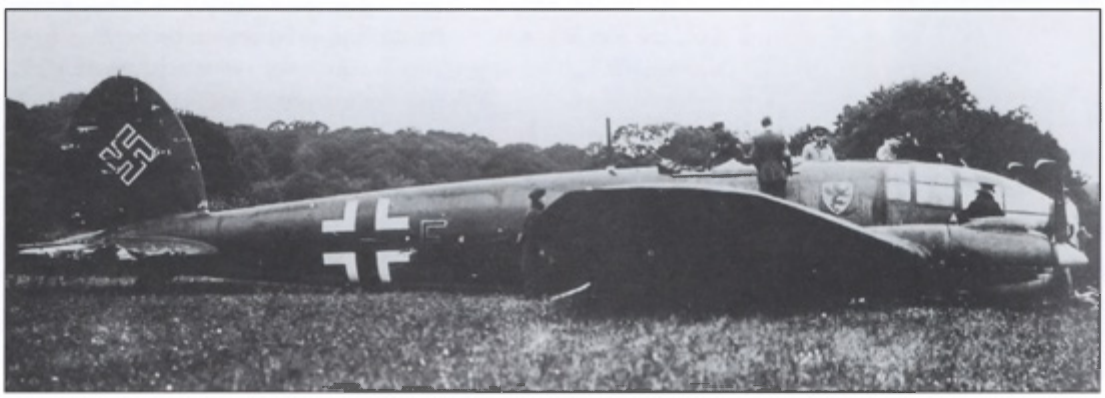
12 July's five casualties went to make up the costliest day of the entire month for the Heinkel *Gruppen*. They came from all three air fleets participating in the Battle (*Luftflotte* 5 was still mounting the occasional foray across the North Sea from its bases in Scandinavia) and illustrate the scattered nature of the He 111s' activities in this first stage of the campaign. A machine of 9./KG 26 fell foul of Spitfires near Aberdeen in Scotland, KG 53 lost three of its aircraft to Hurricanes while attacking a convoy off the Suffolk coast and Hurricanes also accounted for the *Geschwaderstab* KG 55 Heinkel brought down over Southampton Water.

But it was along the English Channel that most of July's action was to take place. The experiences of this unnamed crew of 7./KG 55 are typical of the period;

'We are hanging in the air seemingly motionless in the first pale light of dawn. The English coastline can just be made out to starboard. Three pairs of eyes peer down into the depths searching for the enemy, while a fourth pair keeps watch on the sky above. Our mission – armed reconnaissance of the Channel between Beachy Head and Portland Bill.

'For 30 minutes now the British coast has been sliding slowly past on our right. The Isle of Wight appears. Ten minutes more and then it will be time to reverse course. The same long slog back in the opposite direction? That's going to be a lot more dangerous with no half-light to protect us. But those are our orders, and orders have to be obeyed.

'There, ahead of us, the three pairs of eyes have spotted it at the same time – a ragged wisp of smoke. Just one – that's perfect! A solitary ship is exactly what we've been looking for. The hull is already a dark ellipse on the matt grey mirror of the sea. A quick glance at the coast! The enemy "tub" must be about level with St Alban's Head. Has he seen us yet? The glittering wake at the vessel's stern tells us he's holding steady northeastwards. Right, then – attack!



'G1+FA' of the *Geschwaderstab* KG 55 ended its operational career on its belly in a field north of Fareham after being attacked by Hurricanes over Southampton Water on the afternoon of 12 July

'Our machine dives steeply. We level off 20 metres above the surface of the water. Our bomb-bay doors remain closed. The groundcrew back at base will be none too pleased that we've dropped our bombs without first opening the doors because that means they'll have to straighten out the bent metal again, but if we approach our target with the doors open we will lose at least 30 km/h in speed.

'We can no longer see our prey, but that means we are equally well hidden from him. With any luck he won't hear our engine noise until it's too late to take avoiding action. The tops of masts appear above the horizon, then a funnel and a bridge – a freighter! He's seen us! A thin jet of white steam as his siren sounds the alarm. But it's too late. I feel the jolt as the bombs leave the magazines. I hear the excited chattering of the machine guns behind me. I have lost sight of our target. Then the voice of the wireless operator over the intercom – "Go round again – no return fire!"

'The pilot almost stands "Kurfürst-Richard" on its left wingtip as he heaves the heavy machine around in a tight turn. We're a sitting target, as big as a barn door, if there *are* any gunners aboard the freighter! But the wireless operator was right. I catch sight of the vessel again. Red tongues of flame are licking out of the dark smoke that is already climbing into the bright early morning sky. "Two direct hits" reports the wireless operator, "the first just in front of the bridge, the second on the port side aft of the funnel!"

'"He's had enough", comes the voice of the gunner from the ventral gondola. "Let's get out of here!" Yes, let's get out of here! We haven't got any bombs left anyway, and if our first attack hasn't sunk the freighter, we're not likely to send it under with machine gun fire. I estimate the vessel to be a good 2000-tonner. I wonder what it was carrying? The dark smoke suggests fuel, but it doesn't look like a tanker.

'We climb up to 800 metres and make one last pass over our victim to get some good pictures before settling comfortably into our seats for the flight back to base. But barely five minutes have elapsed when the dry tones of the wireless-operator jerk us upright again. "*Achtung,* fighters. *Achtung,* fighters – 'eight-o-clock' and closing fast!"

'"Height?"

'"About 1500 metres!"

'The calm is shattered. Now it's us on the rack! From hunter we've suddenly become the hunted. The pilot pushes the stick forward and we head for the water again at maximum speed. Behind us the wild staccato drumming of machine gun fire. A shape flashes past overhead. The red, white and blue of the enemy fighter's underwing roundels glare balefully down at us. Then a second dark shadow. A pair of Hurricanes!

'Far ahead we see the two enemy machines curving round for a second pass. Thank God we've got down to wave-top height. At least they won't be able to attack us from below. We race low across the surface of the water towards the French coast. Our machine guns start to chatter again. Then I hear the metallic sound of our aircraft being raked by the Hurricanes' fire. Like angry hornets they bore in again. Between attacks the wireless operator leaves his gun to hammer out an urgent succession of "Js" on the Morse key – the signal that we're under fighter attack – and then he holds the key down to provide a D/F bearing.

'"How much longer to the coast?"

'"Ten minutes!"

'The fourth attack. This time only one of the enemy. Is the other one out of ammunition? The fighter banks steeply away almost in front of our nose. He's gone before I have time to train my machine gun on him. Then I see them. "109s! – 109s!" I yell excitedly. Saved! Now I understand why the Hurricane broke away so abruptly. A *Schwarm* of Messerschmitts approaching fast.

'We start to gain height and spot the French coast at long last. There's Cap Barfleur. We turn eastwards and head for base. "Nothing serious", our crew chief later declares as he inspects the bullet holes in the machine's metal skin. *He* might not think so, but it seemed serious enough to us at the time!'

The anonymous crew of KG 55's 'G1+KR' may have got away with just a few bullet holes in their machine, but the recently appointed *Geschwaderkommodore* of KG 27 was not so lucky. Oberst Georgi had been in office for less than a month, having taken over from Oberst Hans Behrendt towards the end of the campaign in France, when he failed to return from a similar armed-reconnaissance sortie. References to his loss vary, however. While most sources put the date at 17 July, the unit historian states that Oberst Georgi's He 111P went down into the sea after being damaged by return fire from a ship he attacked in the Western Approaches on 15 July.

During the last two weeks of July and the first week in August, while the Luftwaffe's attention was still focused mainly on the English Channel, the Heinkel *Gruppen* continued with their widespread, small-scale raids on strategic targets both by day and by night. Their casualties while thus engaged were minimal. On 14 of the 21 days in question they appear to have suffered no combat losses whatsoever. And of the dozen aircraft that *were* lost during this period, the majority disappeared into Britain's coastal waters, their last resting places stretching from Scotland in the north to the Channel Islands in the southwest. One of the very few to come down on terra firma was a machine of 8./KG 55 that crashed in Berkshire in the early hours of 29 July after being hit by anti-aircraft fire during a night attack on the Bristol aircraft factory at Filton.

By the second week of August the Luftwaffe was readying itself for *'Adlertag'* ('Eagle Day'). This was to be the start of the major air offensive, which Göring was confidently predicting would give him air superiority over southern England in just four days. All that was needed was the fine weather that was promised by the belt of high pressure currently moving up from the Azores.

While it waited, the Luftwaffe staged three heavy attacks on a westbound Channel convoy during the daylight hours of 8 August. But the only two Heinkel losses at this time both occurred in the far north. One was an He 111H of 1./KG 4 from Soesterberg, in

All three machines of Major Hans Schemmell's *Stabskette* III./KG 55 ('G1+AD', 'BD' and 'CD') sit patiently outside their camouflaged Villacoublay hangar as they await their next mission

Holland, which crashed on a Scottish mountainside early on 9 August during a nocturnal minelaying sortie to Belfast Harbour. The other was a machine of the Stavanger-based III./KG 26 that ditched off the coast near Sunderland later that same morning.

After a squally and thundery day on 10 August, the weather began to show definite signs of improvement. 12 August was fine except for a few mist patches. The order was therefore given to launch *'Adlertag'* the following day. But conditions on 13 August proved far from ideal. Further early morning mist, combined with a slight drizzle in places and some cloud over the Channel, caused a last-minute change of plan. The assault was postponed until the afternoon.

Unfortunately a number of units had already taken off. And a breakdown in communications meant that many failed to receive the recall signal. The result was total confusion. In some instances bombers pressed on completely devoid of any fighter cover. In others would-be fighter escorts circled rendezvous points in vain awaiting bombers that never showed up. A number of Ju 88 and Do 17 *Kampfgruppen* suffered badly on *'Adlertag'*, but the day's only He 111 loss was a machine of III./KG 27 shot into the Channel north of Cherbourg by Hurricanes.

Although 'Eagle Day' had misfired disastrously, the Battle had nonetheless entered a new phase with the Luftwaffe finally turning its attention away from Channel shipping and beginning to probe further inland. The He 111 units, meanwhile, kept up their longer-range, penny-packet raids on strategic targets further afield. On 14 August III./KG 27, the *Gruppe* that had sustained the sole Heinkel loss of *'Adlertag'* 24 hours earlier, suffered further attrition at the hands of both Spitfires and Hurricanes when five of its aircraft were shot down during operations over Wales.

14 August was also the date on which the Battle claimed its second Heinkel *Geschwaderkommodore*. Unlike the unfortunate Oberst Georgi of KG 27, however, who had disappeared without trace the previous month, the fate of Oberst Alois Stoeckl, the *Kommodore* of KG 55, is well documented. Stoeckl's *Geschwader* despatched nine separate, small formations against targets in Britain on 14 August. And as was his custom, the *Kommodore* opted to lead one of them himself.

Taking off from Villacoublay in the late afternoon, Oberst Stoeckl assembled his tiny force over Paris before setting course for Liverpool. But he suffered engine problems while *en route* to his objective and had to abort. As he flew back across Hampshire accompanied by just the two wingmen of his *Stabskette*, Stoeckl ordered an attack on one of the region's many RAF airfields. Sources differ as to whether his choice fell on Upavon or Middle Wallop. Either way, it was a fateful decision. Intercepted by Spitfires despite the scattered cloud, the *Kommodore's* machine was badly damaged.

Stoeckl's pilot, Oberleutnant Bruno Brossler, tried to put the stricken 'G1+AA' down in an emergency landing, but he could hardly have chosen a worse spot for the attempt. The Heinkel exploded on impact when it hit the ground in an armaments depot little more than ten kilometres south of Middle Wallop. Oberst Stoeckl and two of his crew were killed instantly and the other two grievously wounded. The incident was described by one of those involved in the attack on the bomber,

Plt Off D M Crook of No 609 Sqn, in his classic wartime book *Spitfire Pilot*, first published less than two years after the event.

The loss of the popular Oberst Stoeckl was deeply felt by KG 55. But it was the following day, 15 August, that was to prove perhaps the 'Hardest Day' of the Battle as far as the He 111 *Gruppen* were concerned. Frustrated by the failure of *'Adlertag'*, the Luftwaffe High Command ordered another maximum effort – its greatest of the entire Battle, in fact – throwing in units from all three participating air fleets, with the UK's airfields as their main targets.

It was the first time that *Luftflotte* 5 in Scandinavia had been involved *en masse* in the Battle, the reasoning being that an attack coming in from across the North Sea would take the undefended northeast unawares. The Luftwaffe planners could not have been more wrong.

The 60+ He 111s of I. and III./KG 26 that took off from Stavanger were supported by a *Gruppe* of Bf 110s (the few Bf 109 fighters stationed in Norway lacking the range to provide adequate cover for the bombers). But the twin-engined *Zerstörer* could not prevent the bombers being given a savage mauling by elements of at least four RAF fighter squadrons. Eight of KG 26's He 111s failed to return, all disappearing into the North Sea. In addition to these eight, a machine of 6./KG 53 was forced to ditch in the Channel and three aircraft of KGr.100 were lost or written-off later that same night. These dozen casualties are believed to be the highest number of Heinkel losses recorded in any one 24-hour period throughout the whole of the Battle.

Over the next few days it was KGs 53 and 55 that suffered the most as the He 111 *Gruppen* took part in a series of raids aimed at airfields in the Home Counties. Four of 16 August's six losses were bombers from KG 55 that failed to return from attacks on airfields to the west of London, including Feltham and Heathrow. Two days later four He 111s from KG 53 were brought down in raids on North Weald and other RAF bases in Essex. Among those killed was Major Reinhold Tamm, the *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./KG 53, whose aircraft went into the sea off the Essex coast. Another casualty of 18 August was 2./KG 1's 'V4+GK', which forced-landed on Romney Marsh after bombing Biggin Hill. But arguably the most unusual loss of the day was the He 111P of 5./KG 27, part of a formation briefed to attack Brize Norton in Oxfordshire, that was destroyed in a mid-air collision with an RAF Anson trainer.

The Luftwaffe's week-long attempt to destroy Fighter Command had clearly failed to achieve its objective, for on 19 August Göring – his hopes for 'air superiority within four days' dashed – declared that 'Until further notice the main task of *Luftflotten* 2 and 3 will be to inflict the utmost damage possible on the enemy's fighter forces'. At the same time he announced that the number of night

7./KG 55's 'G1+FR' did not make it back to Villacoublay after taking part in the 16 August raid on airfields to the west of London. In fact, it did not even make it as far as the Channel. The bomber's bullet-riddled carcass is seen here lying among the hedgerows of the South Downs

Giving a good impression of a beached whale, the machine being scrutinised here by an army officer and a local bobby is one of the five He 111Hs of II./KG 1 that were shot down during the *Gruppe's* 30 August attack on Farnborough. One minor oddity – although listed as belonging to 5./KG 1, the aircraft is wearing the badge usually associated with 11./KG 1, and bears that same *Staffel's* 'V4+HV' code markings

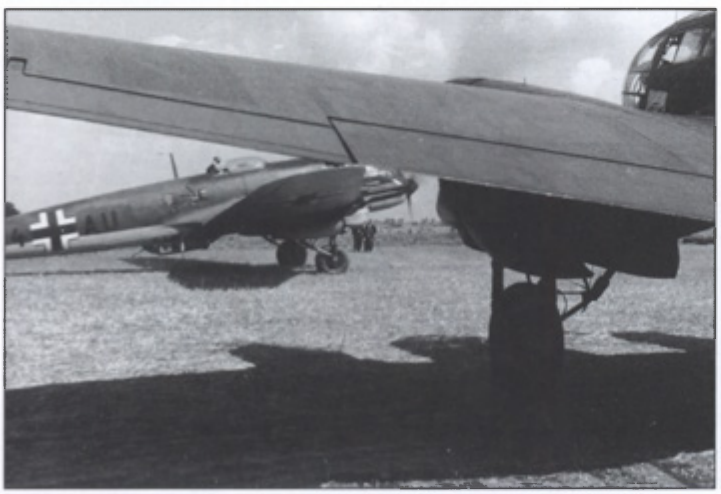
raids on strategic targets was to be increased. But cloudy weather postponed this new and crucial phase of the Battle until 24 August, which was to witness yet further attacks on airfields in the southeast, plus a heavy daylight raid on Portsmouth. 9./KG 53 paid a particularly high price for its temerity in targeting RAF Hornchurch. All five of the day's Heinkel losses came from the ranks of this one *Staffel* alone.

A further 27 He 111s would fail to return from day and night operations over the United Kingdom during the final week of August, with the unfortunate KG 53 continuing to bear the brunt of the casualties. These culminated in the *Geschwader* losing six more of its aircraft (from all three *Gruppen*) during attacks on Hatfield and Radlett on 30 August. The five other Heinkel losses on this date all resulted from a raid on Biggin Hill by II./KG 1.

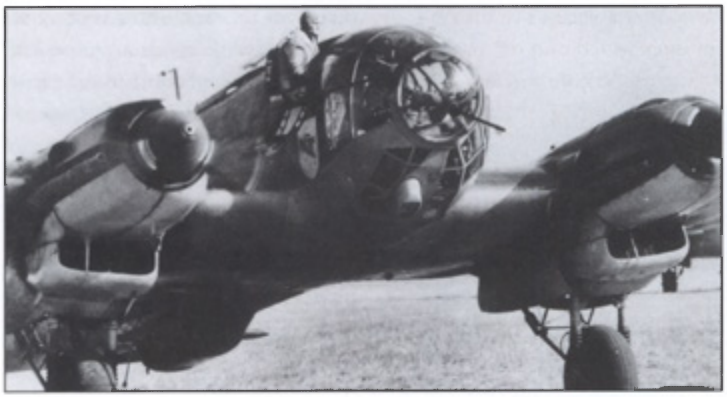
No He 111s were lost on 31 August, but no losses did not necessarily mean that there had been no operations. KG 1, for example, had returned to Biggin Hill for the second time in two days – and managed on this occasion to get away almost scot-free;

'Yesterday evening (30 August) the *Gruppe* was briefed for another daylight raid on Biggin Hill. At 1736 hrs this afternoon we took off and formed up over Calais. We crossed the Channel in close formation, heading directly for the target area. Our fighter escort did an excellent job. They prevented the English fighters from getting anywhere near us, allowing us to lay a carpet of bombs right across the airfield. Despite the heavy flak my navigator, Oberleutnant Heinrich *Prinze* zu Sayn-Wittgenstein (later a high-scoring nightfighter ace), managed to take several photographs of our stick of bombs "walking" across the target. At 2010 hrs we landed back at Rosieères. We had suffered no casualties, just some minor flak damage.'

For some as yet unknown reason, it appears that II./KG 1 was wearing IV. *Gruppe* codes at this time, as illustrated by this 4. *Staffel* machine at Amiens plainly marked as 'V4+AU'. And to muddy the waters still further, the aircraft in the foreground bears 4./KG 1's 'Cow riding a bomb' unit badge . . .



In addition to attacking RAF airfields, the Luftwaffe was now also targeting Britain's aviation industry. Just four days after their second visit to Biggin Hill, the He 111s of KG 1 participated in a raid on the Short Brothers aircraft factory at Rochester. One history of the Battle describes this attack as being made by 'heavily escorted German bombers fighting their way through intense fighter opposition'. But the following personal account by one member of the *Geschwader* paints a rather different picture of events that day;



. . . which is more clearly visible in this close-up of the nose of the same machine

'On 4 September the *Gruppe* carried out a daylight raid on the aircraft works at Rochester. Although lasting only 150 minutes (from 1240 hrs until 1510 hrs), it was a tough mission as the target lay at the very limit of our Me 109s' effective escort range.

'The Spitfires first attacked from out of the sun, each picking a target before diving away. Some then climbed back up again to make a second attack from below. We were very much reliant on our own collective defensive fire. The few Me 109s that were still hanging on to us could do little. If they became involved in a dogfight they would either be shot down or use up their last remaining fuel and be unable to make it back across the Channel.

'For us, it was most unpleasant to have to watch the English roundels wheeling about at close range right in front of our noses. But we were lucky. The presence alone of our few escorting fighters, however passive their behaviour, seemed to have a deterrent effect and stopped the enemy from mounting a coordinated attack – presumably they were unaware of the Me 109s' problems. Once again we all returned safely to base with nothing but flak damage. But other units were not so fortunate.'

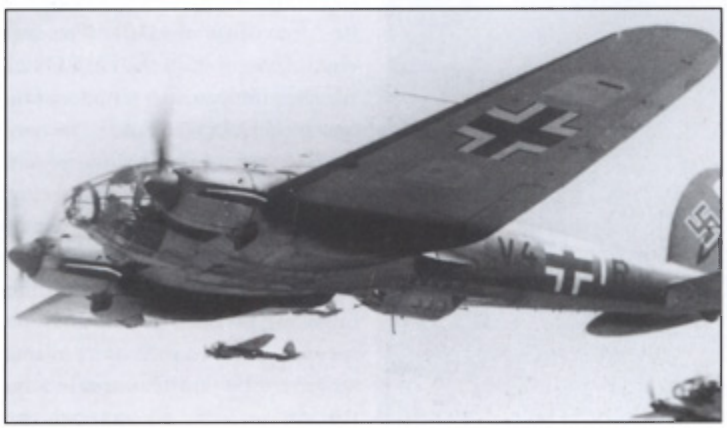
The 'other units' referred to above must have belonged to the fighter arm, for Bf 109s and Bf 110s accounted for all but two of the day's 24 combat losses. The only recorded He 111 casualty of 4 September was a machine of 4./KG 26 that disappeared over the North Sea.

By early September KG 1, like almost every other *Kampfgeschwader* operating under *Luftflotten* 2 and 3, was regularly flying missions by night as well as by day. But the mantle of darkness was no guarantee of safety. III./KG 1 had already lost its *Gruppenkommandeur* in the early hours of 27 August when Major Willibald Fanelsa's aircraft had been damaged by anti-aircraft fire during a raid on the Coventry area. The entire crew had, however, managed to bail out before the machine crashed.

But I./KG 1's Major Ludwig Maier was not so fortunate on the night of 4/5 September. His 'V4+AB' was coned by searchlights over Tilbury Docks and set upon by a Blenheim nightfighter. The *Kommandeur* and three of his crew were killed. Indeed, only the pilot of the aircraft, Oberleutnant Peter Biberach, survived after bailing out at low level. A machine of 6./KG 4 was also lost that night over northeast England, while two He 111s of 7./KG 53 were downed during an afternoon raid on Thameshaven oil depot on the 5th.

These same three *Geschwader*, KGs 1, 4 and 53, were each to suffer

By contrast, the He 111s of III./KG 1 were models of conformity. Here, 7./KG 1's 'V4+IR' not only displays the correct codes, but also the *Staffel's* yellow rhomboid emblem (just visible above the tail swastika) – but not for much longer. On 6 September III./KG 1 would return to Germany to begin conversion onto Ju 88s



two losses apiece 48 hours later, by which time the Battle had undergone an unexpected and dramatic change. The Luftwaffe did not realise just how close its constant attacks of the past fortnight had come to defeating Fighter Command and giving them the air superiority that Göring so desperately craved. What they *did* know was that those two weeks had cost them 107 bombers (nearly half of them Heinkels), and that the RAF appeared far from beaten. A change of tactics was called for. And it was the events of the same two weeks that triggered them.

On the night of 25 August a number of bombs had fallen on London. As Hitler had expressly forbidden the bombing of the capital, the incidents were described as 'accidental' and the blame was laid at the door of faulty navigation. But this did not prevent Bomber Command from replying in kind the following night when it despatched some 50 aircraft against Berlin. The damage inflicted was negligible – two people were reported to have been slightly injured – but the outcome was inevitable. Never tardy in taking revenge, Hitler personally ordered 'the start of reprisal raids against London'.

The pressure on the RAF's fighter airfields was lifted as the Luftwaffe obeyed its *Führer's* command by throwing almost its entire weight against London. September was to be the climax of the Battle of Britain – and the end of it as far as major daylight operations by the Heinkel *Kampfgruppen* were concerned. The first heavy attacks on London were launched in the late afternoon of 7 September, and raids continued throughout the night until dawn the next day.

It might be argued that Hitler's intervention cost the Luftwaffe the Battle. In the more immediate term it certainly cost Göring some 40 of his aircraft, plus many more damaged. Eight of 7 September's losses were Heinkels, four of which were able to limp back across the Channel before being written off in crashes. Only one came down over the UK, a machine of II./KG 53 that forced-landed on the Isle of Grain. Among the three that went into the sea was a minelayer of KGr.126, which had Oberstleutnant Geisse, the *Geschwaderkommodore* of KG 40, on board. Geisse and the three remaining members of the mixed KG 40/KGr.126 crew perished.

One of the most famous images of the Battle of Britain – an unidentified He 111 seen above the Thames on the evening of 7 September 1940. The three parallel black basins to the right of the aircraft are the West India Docks. Known as 'Target Area G' to the wartime Luftwaffe, it is more commonly referred to today as Canary Wharf

Another of the He 111s that ditched on 7 September was an aircraft of the *Gruppenstab* I./KG 53. It is on record as being shot into the sea by fighters off Harwich at 1800 hrs during a 'weather reconnaissance' sortie. Curiously, that is not how Oberfeldwebel Martin Winter, the pilot of 'A1+AB', remembered his last flight, however;

'Take-off at 1540 hrs. Target, the King George V docks on the

Thames. Approach altitude 3000 metres. Heavy flak fire. Shortly before the target I spot about 15 Spitfires climbing up towards us.

'We have just dropped our bombs when I hear something hitting the left side of the aircraft. A burst of machine gun fire from below has shredded the leading-edge of the port wing. Vertical strips of shiny metal surround the exit holes like fence posts. Within moments the coolant temperature gauge has risen to 140 degrees. A cooling pipe has been hit. I switch the engine to idle and have to drop away from the formation.

'My left-hand wingman remains at my side until shortly before Dover. Heading for Douai, I set out across the Channel at low altitude in order to avoid detection by the English radar. Soon the French coast comes into sight. But the wireless operator suddenly shouts 'Two Spitfires on our tail!' Hardly are the words out of his mouth before the machine is again shuddering under the impact of enemy fire. The fighters are aiming at our right engine. Everything happens so quickly. At a height of barely 50 metres we don't have a lot of choices.

'The right engine has all but given up the ghost as well now. There is a heavy swell running. I lower the landing flaps to their full extent and decide to ditch at right angles to the waves to prevent the machine from being swamped. I let the first wave slide past below me, descend into the trough, give the engines full throttle – I had been nursing them both at idle – climb the slope of the oncoming wave and them slam the machine onto its crest. A massive jolt and we are safely down.

'The flight engineer immediately releases the rubber dinghy, but it just floats limply on the surface. So, flying boots off and jump into the water – thank God it isn't cold. I can find no bullet holes in the dinghy, but then discover to my horror that the compressed-air bottle has not been attached to it. One of the gunners was killed in the final fighter attack, but now the other three members of the crew abandon the machine, which sinks five minutes later.

'My desperate attempts to inflate the dinghy by mouth cost a lot of effort, but at least it is beginning to

Many He 111s were able to limp back across the Channel before being written off in crashes – although few made quite as thorough a job of it as this unknown casualty

Another that did not even get as far as the Channel. It is thought that this impressive funeral pyre marks the end of the *Geschwaderstab* KG 1's 'V4+FA', brought down on Walland Marsh to the east of Rye on the afternoon of 11 September. With invasion still very much a possibility, the flat marshland was dotted with anti-glider stakes as seen here in the background

assume some kind of shape. But then I can do no more. I am completely out of breath and have swallowed too much seawater. I help the flight engineer into the half inflated dinghy. Not having to swim at the same time, he is able to slowly blow it up a lot more.

'In the meantime the wireless operator has disappeared. He insisted on trying to swim to the lightship we had flown over shortly before we ditched, and there was simply no stopping him. We never see him again. I subsequently learnt that his body was washed ashore on the French coast many months later.

'So now we are three. The dinghy is capable of carrying us. We all climb into it and await events. Suddenly, a white-painted Red Cross machine – a twin-engined Focke-Wulf Fw 58 "Weihe" – appears overhead and starts circling us. But a suspicious Spitfire soon drives it off again. Dusk is already falling when we spot an He 59 floatplane low on the horizon. I send up a red flare and it turns in our direction. We wave wildly as it flies past ten metres above our heads. It then attempts to put down on the water close by but is prevented from doing so by the heavy swell.

'It flies over us one last time before turning away and heading back towards the French coast. By now it is pitch black night. But we are comforted by the fact that we have at least been found. Then, for the next 36 hours, we do not see a living soul. It is not until 0630 hrs on Monday, 9 September that a couple of torpedo boats come speeding towards us. And it is with mixed feelings that we recognise the English flags fluttering stiffly at their mastheads, for it means that our immediate fate has been decided – captivity.'

For the remainder of the month the Heinkel *Gruppen* suffered varying degrees of attrition. Some days were totally loss-free, while others would see a handful of machines or more failing to return from operations. And, inevitably, some units were unluckier than others. On 10 September II./KG 4 was particularly unfortunate to have eight of its He 111Ps destroyed during an RAF bombing raid on its Eindhoven base.

Twenty-four hours later, on 11 September, Heinkel losses climbed into double figures for the third and last time in the Battle. Most, if not all, of the missing aircraft had been involved in raids on London. Nearly half of the casualties came from I./KG 26. Since the debacle of the raid across the North Sea on 15 August, this *Gruppe* had been transferred down from *Luftflotte* 5 in Norway to *Luftflotte* 2, joining II./KG 26 in the Low Countries. Whether I. *Gruppe's* relative unfamiliarity with cross-Channel operations was a factor in the unit's losing five machines and having six others damaged (nearly its entire serviceable strength at the time!) is not clear. In comparison, II./KG 26 got away with 'just' two lost and four damaged. Three aircraft of KG 1 and one from the *Geschwaderstab* KG 55 then took the day's total losses overall to 11.

15 September – now celebrated annually by the British as 'Battle of Britain Day' – was to see the last massed daylight bombing raids on London. Although the Luftwaffe's losses were far fewer than the 185 claimed by the defenders at the time, the day was nonetheless a 'crushing defeat for Göring's bomber forces'. It represented the true climax of the entire Battle, and led to a fundamental change in Luftwaffe policy. Henceforth the 'main weight' of the continuing daylight air offensive against Great Britain (more

The shadows are already lengthening as yet more Heinkels are readied to take the fight to England's shores . . .

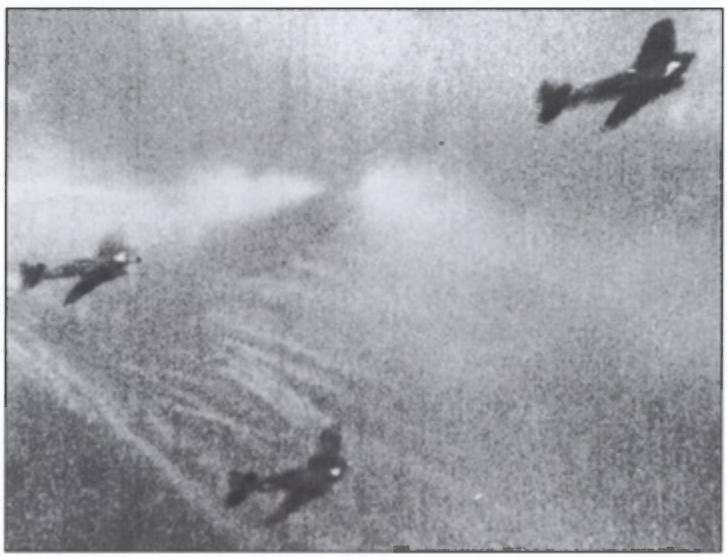
accurately, against southern England) would be borne by small formations of high-flying fighter-bombers, while bomber operations were restricted more and more to the hours of darkness.

As to 15 September itself, it was the sorely tried Do 17 *Gruppen* that once again felt the full fury of Fighter Command's attacks. The Heinkel units escaped reasonably lightly, with six of their nine losses coming from the ranks of KG 53. All six fell on English soil. I./KG 26 suffered just one casualty on this date, as too did I./KG 1. The ninth and final loss of the day was a machine of 9./KG 55, shot into the Channel during a raid on Portland dockyards.

With the bombing of London by day virtually at an end, it fell to the *Kampfgeschwader* of *Luftflotte* 3 in the west, principally KG 55, to carry out the last raids of any significance to be flown during the daylight Battle of Britain. Shortly before midday on 25 September nearly 60 He 111s from all three *Gruppen* of KG 55, heavily escorted by Bf 110s, attacked the Bristol Aeroplane Company's works at Filton. The raid caused extensive damage, at a cost to the attackers of four of their number.

The following day KG 55 repeated its performance against Supermarine's Spitfire factory at Woolston outside Southampton. Again, the target was successfully bombed (Spitfire production being completely halted for a short time) for just one Heinkel lost.

On 30 September KG 55 set out to strike at yet a third aircraft plant – the Westland works at Yeovil. However, on this occasion the attackers, comprising 40 machines of I. and II. *Gruppen* (III./KG 55 had returned to Villacoublay just a few hours earlier after a night raid on Merseyside), were thwarted by cloud over the target area. Forced to bomb blind, the Heinkels turned back towards the coast, being harried by fighters all the while.

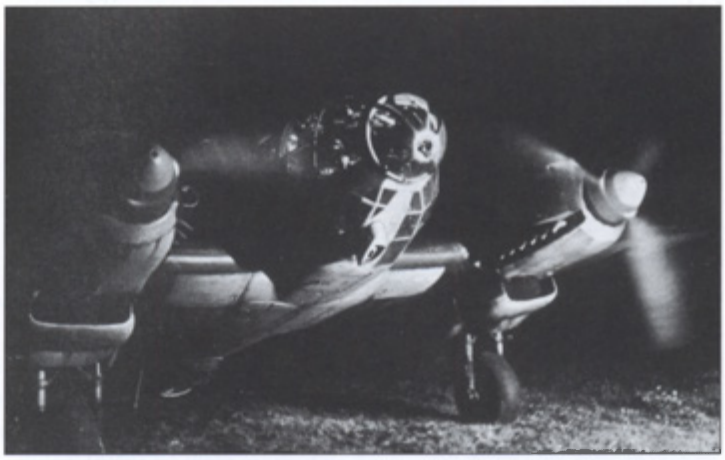


. . . but that fight was about to be conceded. Another iconic Battle of Britain image showing He 111s under a hail of fire from RAF fighters. The losses that the Luftwaffe's bombers were suffering by day were no longer sustainable

This day had been witness to a number of raids on southern England, the Luftwaffe's targets stretching from Kent to Somerset. They had resulted in 'the last major daylight air battles fought over Britain'. The Luftwaffe had lost a total of 46 aircraft in all. Among them were the four He 111s from KG 55 that had failed to return from Yeovil.

THE NIGHT BLITZ

The transition from day bombing offensive to night *Blitz* was a fairly lengthy process. Small formations of bombers continued to carry out daylight raids throughout October, but by the end of November the only Heinkel units still operating regularly by day were those engaged in anti-shipping operations in Britain's coastal waters. For the bulk of the Luftwaffe's bombers, those now targeting cities and industrial centres by night, the air war in the west during the winter of 1940/41 was perforce purely strategic in nature. It was a war to which He 111s, no longer having to face RAF day fighter squadrons, were far more suited. Britain's nocturnal defences at this time were totally inadequate. Heinkel crews had little to fear from their enemy's fledgling nightfighter force, and many professed to regard British anti-aircraft fire with some scorn.

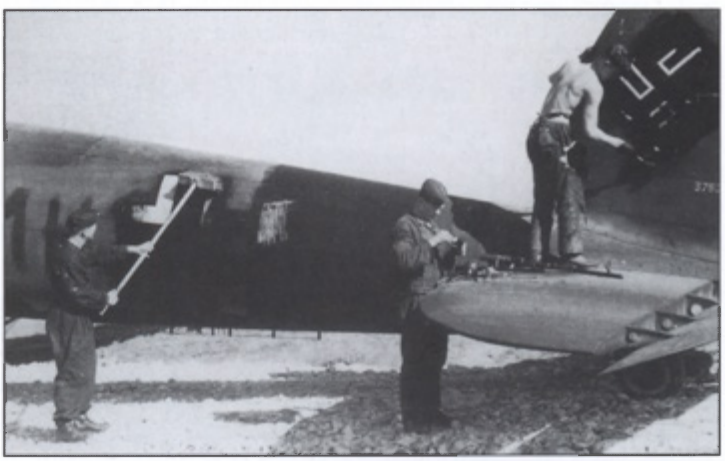


With daylight losses becoming prohibitive, the Heinkel crews found themselves having to operate during the hours of darkness

Whether this latter view was justified or not, He 111 losses fell significantly during the closing months of 1940. September's total of 90+ was reduced by more than a half in October, and then halved again in November and December. And many of these casualties were accounted for by damaged machines that had limped back across the Channel before being written-off in crashes in France or the Low Countries. It would not be until the spring of 1941, by which time Britain's night defences had improved immeasurably, that Heinkel losses began to climb again. The Luftwaffe's response to this increased attrition would then be another change of tactics. It abandoned massed raids against a single target and instead divided its forces to strike at several objectives on the same night.

Another feature of the night *Blitz* was the proliferation of specialised roles among the He 111 *Gruppen*. The most notable of these were, of course, the veteran pathfinders of KGr.100, whose Heinkel 'three-masters' – so called on account of the machines' two additional dorsal aerial masts – were equipped with the 'X-*Gerät*', an automatic bombing guidance device based on the use of radio beams.

Most machines were soon being given a coat of washable black distemper as night camouflage



'6N+BH' was a typical KGr.100 *'Dreimaster'* ('Three master') pathfinder of the early war years. In this photograph the rearmost mast – mounted directly above the fuselage cross – is, unfortunately, difficult to make out against the starboard tailplane

KGr.100 were to lead many of the most successful raids of the night *Blitz*. But it was not the only pathfinder unit among the ranks of the He 111s. II./KG 55 were recognised as specialist navigators who employed traditional methods to locate and illuminate a given target by dropping marker flares ahead of the main bomber force. In addition, a number of III./KG 26's machines were fitted with the even more advanced and accurate 'Y-*Gerat*', which provided geographical coordinates of the target and, in theory, gave bombing accuracy to within a radius of 25 metres.

One of the main drawbacks of 'Y-*Gerat*', apart from its susceptibility to jamming, was that it could be used by only one bomber at a time. But III./KG 26 was also an *elite* unit in another way. At this stage of the war it contained the only crews trained to deliver the SC 2500 'Max', which, at 2500 kg (5500 lbs), was the heaviest bomb to be dropped on Britain during the Blitz. Employed properly, a single Heinkel, equipped with 'Y-*Gerät*' and carrying 'Max', could produce devastating results.

As well as pathfinders, the Heinkel *Gruppen* also included specialised anti-shipping units. Foremost amongst them were *Luftflotte* 3's I./KG 1 and I./KG 27 (whose favoured hunting grounds were the Western Approaches and the Bristol and St George's Channels), while I./KG 4 and KGr.126 were responsible for minelaying operations in Britain's eastern and western coastal waters, respectively. KGr.126, as a matter of record, would become the second I./KG 28 in January 1941.

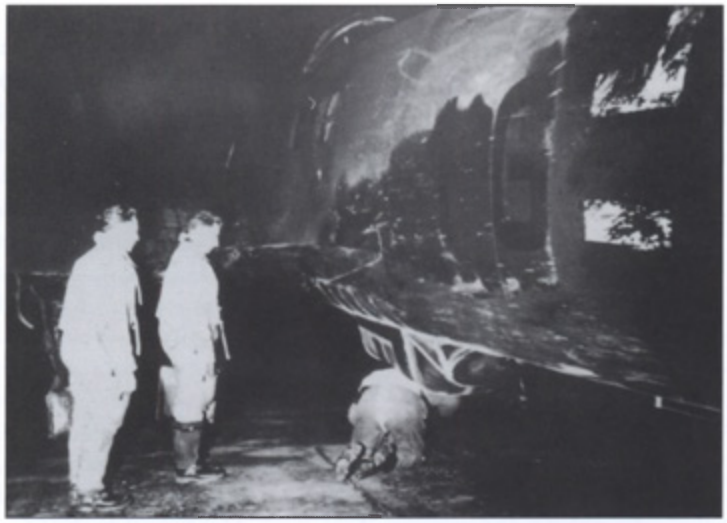
For the remaining He 111 units (11 'rank-and-file' *Kampfgruppen* deployed by *Luftflotten* 2 and 3), the eight months of the *Blitz* were little more than a wearying, repetitious round of missions. Flown night after night, often in total darkness from take-off until landing, operations 'became a blur, one hardly distinguishable from the other'. Crews' only relief came when a mission was scrubbed because of bad weather.

London was their principal target – during one period the capital was attacked on 57 consecutive nights – but raids were also carried out on many provincial cities and individual industrial targets. The damage inflicted was at times severe, but at no stage did the *Blitz* ever come close to breaking Britain's will to continue the fight before, in June 1941, the night bombing campaign was abruptly brought to an end by Hitler's near incomprehensible decision to turn eastwards and invade the Soviet Union.

But to go back to the beginning, the first Heinkel night casualties of

A pair of 500 kg LMAs (*Luftminen 'A'* or Aerial Mines Type 'A') wait to be loaded aboard a night-camouflaged He 111H

October 1940 were the all-NCO crew of 5./KG 53's 'A1+LN', which failed to return from a raid on London when the month was but hours old. It is believed that the machine fell victim to anti-aircraft fire. The Luftwaffe bombers should perhaps have been less dismissive of British 'flak', for the two losses suffered during the night of 4/5 October were likewise attributed to London's anti-aircraft defences. One was an aircraft of II./KG 1 that crashed in Sussex, the other a pathfinder of 1./KGr.100 that disappeared into the Channel while attempting to get back to Vannes.



A crew from KG 27 demonstrate just how awkward it was to crawl into an He 111 via the ventral bathtub hatch

It was not until the early hours of 16 October that a Heinkel reportedly first fell foul of an RAF nightfighter. The bomber in question was a minelayer of 2./KGr.126 that was caught by a Defiant in the Thames Estuary area and downed over Essex. Coincidentally, late in the evening of that same day another machine of the same *Staffel* was brought down after blundering into the balloon barrage protecting Harwich Harbour.

Such occurrences were the exception rather than the rule, however. The majority of the month's casualties were written-off in crashes or forced-landings back on the Continent. Four machines were lost in this way on 17 October, plus another four in similar fashion five days later. Three of the latter incidents involved aircraft of KG 27. One He 111H of I. *Gruppe* crashed into a barracks building upon its return to Tours, killing not only the entire crew, but also 13 of the field's ground personnel. And some 190 km away at Rennes an He 111P of III./KG 27 with *Gruppenkommandeur* Major Manfred *Freiherr* von Sternburg on board crashed in flames, again with the loss of all its crew.

From the smiles on their faces, these life-jacketed crewmen are clearly relieved to have made it back to friendly territory after one of October's many raids. Again, note the additional machine gun in the nose of this He 111P

One of October's last Heinkel losses, like the first, was a machine of KG 53. 9. *Staffel's* 'A1+LT' was abandoned by its crew who had lost their bearings after bombing the airfield at Gravesend, in Kent. The aircraft crashed into the River Stour near Harwich, not far from where the 2./KGr.126 minelayer had come down a fortnight earlier.

The first two weeks of November were relatively quiet. But then came the night of 14/15 November and the devastating attack on Coventry. Another 'reprisal raid' ordered from on high, this time in response to the bombing of Munich six nights previously, it tore the heart out of the city and caused massive damage to the surrounding areas.

The raid, code-named *'Mondscheinsonate'* ('Moonlight Sonata'), was led by the pathfinding Heinkels of KGr.100, but the anonymous war-correspondent who wrote the following account was obviously aboard an aircraft in one of the follow-up waves;

'We realise at briefing that tonight's mission is something special. The *Gruppenkommandeur* makes that quite clear right from the start. Before giving details of the precise course to be flown and the weather we can expect to encounter, he stresses that High Command are demanding an all-out effort from us, and expect nothing less than total success.

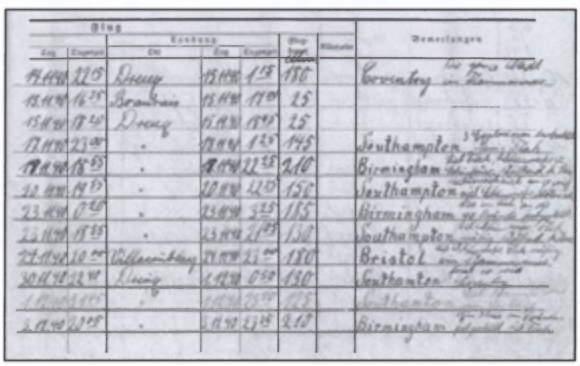
'Our heavily laden *"Cäsar"* is the first machine to take off and head for the enemy island across the Channel. We all know that we have a long and dangerous flight ahead of us. Fortunately the storms that we had to battle against on our last two missions have died away. In good visibility – just a few scattered clouds and some light mist – we cross the English coast. In conditions such as these the towns, rivers and canals provide excellent navigational markers. The coastal flak has already sent up its first salvoes to welcome us. Searchlights are weaving about agitatedly in the darkening night sky. In the distance we can make out some signs of activity over London. Other units must be attacking the city tonight. A pall of smoke, its undersides tinged a dull red from the reflected fires below, and the intermittent twinkling of exploding flak shells provide evidence enough. But we skirt the capital's sea of houses at high altitude. Our bombs are destined for a different target tonight.

'Inside the aircraft all is quiet. Apart from the dim glow of the lamp that the navigator is using to fix our position, we are now enveloped in darkness. Searchlights or flak won't bother us until we reach the Midlands. Then a surprised yell. Far to the north of us a huge blaze seems to have broken out. Can it be Coventry already? That's our designated target for tonight. The fires we can see must be the work of those flying ahead of us. For minutes on end parachute flares hang suspended in the sky above the burning city. As we approach, the picture becomes clearer. It's not yet midnight and already German bombs have inflicted a tremendous amount of damage in the target area. Now it's our turn. The commander quietly gives instructions to the pilot. "A little more to the right . . . a bit more. That's it. Keep her steady!"

'We get closer and closer. The terrible beauty of the scene below strikes us dumb. Thick clouds of smoke are drifting across the roofs of the city and out over the open countryside beyond. We can clearly see bright tongues of flame leaping high into the air. A particularly fierce inferno, surrounded by numerous smaller fires, shows where a large industrial plant is blazing fiercely.

'We are over the target. The flak is banging away desperately. Explosions surround us but do no damage. We are the lead aircraft of our formation. Others have preceded us. More will follow until the first light of dawn reveals the true extent of the catastrophe that has befallen Coventry.'

Incredibly, only one of the 500+ bombers despatched against Coventry – a Do 17 – failed to return (just as the RAF lost only one Hampden during its much smaller raid on Munich). Coventry


Flug

Flug	Landung			Bemerkungen
	Ort			
22.15	Dreux	1.15	180	Coventry
16.25	Boulogne	17.40	25	
17.45	Dreux	18.10	25	
23.45	"	1.30	145	Southampton
18.55	"	22.35	240	Birmingham
19.15	"	22.20	150	Southampton
0.45	"	3.35	185	Birmingham
19.55	"	23.05	130	Southampton
20.55	Villacoublay	23.35	180	Bristol
22.40	Dreux	0.50	130	Southampton
23.05	"	2.35	210	Birmingham

An extract from the logbook of a 2./KG 55 navigator who took part in the raid on Coventry. It can be seen that the aircraft was in the air for exactly 180 minutes, from the time of take-off from Dreux at 2215 hrs on the night of 14 November until landing back again at 0115 hrs the following morning. In the 'Remarks' column at far right, future Knight's Cross recipient Franz Placzek has written the name of the target, and added the comment 'The whole town a sea of flames'

was to be a defining moment in the night *Blitz*. The city's name joined those of Guernica, Warsaw and Rotterdam on the list of Luftwaffe bombing 'atrocities'. But the war went on. In the final six weeks of 1940 the He 111 *Kampfgruppen* lost another 35 aircraft, two-thirds of them crashing on the Continent. That two-to-one ratio was reflected in KG 26's experiences during the night of 19/20 November. The *Geschwader* lost three machines, two in crashes in France. Both crews perished, among them the *Kommodore*, Oberstleutnant Karl *Freiherr* von Wechmar. The third aircraft's wing was torn off when it hit a balloon cable near London during a mission to Birmingham. Again, the entire crew lost their lives in the crash.

Although London was no longer receiving the bombers' undivided attention, it still remained the Luftwaffe's primary target. The first of December's three major attacks on the capital was carried out on the night of 8/9th and was led by 16 pathfinders of KGr.100;

'Radio beams guide us unerringly towards our objective – target area "J" to the west of London. It is bitterly cold. The thermometer is showing 25 degrees below zero outside. 'Four minutes to target', the navigator announces. Through a gap in the clouds we spot a pattern of lights sliding past below us, but we ignore them. It's a known decoy site. The timer of the "X-*Gerat*" is already ticking down to the moment of automatic bomb release. The bombs are all ready to go! The machine lurches as they leave their bays and tumble away into the darkness. "Bye, bye!"

'"All bombs gone!" I bank away. A searchlight latches onto us and I have to shield my eyes against the glare. Flak bursts just behind our tail. I try to fool British sound detectors by constantly changing height and engine revs. Other searchlights are now searching for us, but without success. Our soot-black camouflage protects us. More twisting and turning before I finally escape, leaving London burning behind us.'

The Heinkels of KGr.100 were again leading the way during the two heavy raids flown against Manchester on consecutive nights later in the month. And in the second of them, carried out on 23/24 December, another of the Luftwaffe's apparently inexhaustible supply of war correspondents was aboard one of 171 bombers of the main force;

'The day before Christmas Eve and we are preparing to attack Manchester, one of England's most important armaments manufacturing areas, for the second time in 48 hours. Outside, on the hard-frozen icy surface of the airfield, there is little sign of the Christmas spirit in evidence. Groups of "black men" are feverishly working on the fully loaded bombers, giving them a final once-over before the mission.

It's hellishly cold again tonight. Strange, the difference in temperatures last night during our first major raid on Manchester. More than 10 degrees below zero on the ground, around zero at 2000 metres, and then back down to 10 below

Also from 2./KG 55, this night-dappled He 111P was lucky to get back to Dreux with its starboard tailplane and elevator in such a state. This was clearly no taxiing accident. The shrapnel holes peppering the tailfin indicate a *very* close burst of anti-aircraft fire indeed!

between 4000-5000 metres. What's it likely to be tonight – 15 degrees below? It's a good job that our faithful Heinkel has such an efficient heating system, otherwise by now – we've already been airborne for a good half-an-hour – we wouldn't be able to move our fingers at all.

'Exactly on schedule we cross England's south coast. Far off to the right we can see a faint red glow in the heavens. That can only be London. On our left there are also signs of activity over another town, which the navigator identifies for me as Southampton.

'Then, off to starboard ahead of us, a small black dot appears in the sky. It's approaching fast! A nightfighter? I am just about to report it when the pilot gives a shout, "Nightfighter!" And there, another small dot. Have they seen us? The sky is cloudless and, to make matters worse, we were held in the beam of a searchlight a few seconds ago. "Damn and blast, there's a third one!" the pilot mutters to himself. But as they get closer we realise they are way above us. The three dots are transformed into small black crosses as they pass high overhead. They haven't spotted us!

'We are over the Midlands now. Down there somewhere is the dead town of Coventry, with Birmingham off to its left. The flak is getting heavier. Suddenly, our trusty Heinkel lurches sideways as if swatted by some unseen giant hand. That was a close one!

'While still a good hundred kilometres away from the target the horizon takes on a dull red hue. In the sky above it tiny pinpricks of light form a twinkling canopy. There can be no mistaking it – Manchester! For endless nerve-wracking minutes we head towards our objective. Our approach is spot-on – past the cathedral and the large university building nearby, before releasing our bombs on a vast factory complex which, according to our photo-recce maps, houses heavy industrial plant.

'As we finally cross back over the coast of France the pilot dryly remarks, "Well lads, we'll empty a few bottles this evening". "Why's that?" the wireless operator asks. "Man alive!" the leutnant affects surprise, "you really don't know? Then let me be the first to congratulate everyone on completing their 50th mission over England!"'

The only He 111 lost during this operation was one of KGr.100's ten pathfinders that was caught over the Channel by a patrolling Beaufighter nightfighter not long after take-off and before darkness had fully descended. Sending the bomber down in flames into the clouds below, the Beaufighter pilot claimed his opponent as 'destroyed'. In fact, the crew of '6N+DL' managed to jettison their load of blazing incendiary markers and limp back across the Channel for a forced-landing near Cherbourg. It was on this same night of 23/24 December that a He 111 of III./KG 26 dropped an SC 2500 'Max' on Portsmouth. This was only the second time that the Luftwaffe is known to have made use of its 2.5-ton 'blockbuster' during the *Blitz*, the first having narrowly missed Victoria Station during a minor raid on London two nights previously.

The last recorded casualties of an eventful year for the Heinkel *Kampfgruppen* in the west were suffered in the early hours of 29 December. They were three machines of II./KG 53, two of which were damaged in emergency-landings on returning to their Lille-Vendeville base. The third crashed nearby, killing all four crewmembers.

With less than a dozen losses recorded in each, the first two months of 1941 were the least expensive of the entire *Blitz* for the He 111 units.

This was due in no small part to the unfavourable weather. On half the nights in January there was little or no bomber activity at all except for some sporadic minelaying. And even when missions *were* flown, the elements could often play havoc with operational plans. The evening of 12 January, which saw the launch of the second of two consecutive heavy night raids on London, was one such occasion. Forecast winds for much of northern France were 'light to moderate', but in the far west the pathfinders of KGr.100 ran into unexpected storm force winds almost immediately after taking off from Vannes, as one pilot describes;

While a member of the groundcrew (right) tops up the port outer fuel tank, a group of armourers begin the tricky job of hoisting an SC 2500 'Max' onto III./KG 26's '1H+PT'

'Rain clouds are chasing each other across the stormy night sky. I have to keep an iron grip on the control yoke. The faint glimmer of the moon appears as the last ragged shreds of cloud whip past our wings and then we're out of the turbulent ocean of grey and into the starlit heavens. But in front of us tower even higher mountains of clouds piled one on top of the other, contorted and writhing in bizarre formations.

'I push the throttles forward and try to climb above them, but it's hopeless. They come rushing towards us and we are quickly enveloped again. The air currents within the bellies of these swollen monsters throw the machine about like a child's toy. The wings are shaken by enormous gusts of wind. The compass of the autopilot topples and the aircraft is suddenly out of control. It lurches over into a steep dive. The airspeed indicator goes haywire. The altimeter unwinds at an alarming rate. In a split second I have switched off the automatic pilot, eased off the power, and got the machine back under some sort of control.

'Full boost! We are climbing at a rate of seven metres a second again. Eventually the clouds come to an end and we are bathed in moonlight. Ahead of us we can make out a coastline. What, the French coast? We've been in the air for the best part of an hour and we're only just approaching the French coast? Far below ghostly white spray flecks the surface of the storm tossed Channel. It takes us almost another hour to cross this angry stretch of water! We must be battling a head wind of more than 100 km/h, but at long last we fly in over Eastbourne, identifiable by its nearby headland.

'At 0350 hrs we are finally over London. Despite the late hour the defences are still formidable. Our incendiaries tumble down into the darkness, which swallows them up. After 25 seconds tiny sparks march in ragged lines across the unseen

The weather played a significant part in operations. Groundcrew push a night-camouflaged He 111P back into its sandbagged and camouflage-netted dispersal pen at an unidentified but rain lashed airfield – another successful mission completed, or one just scrubbed?

ground below. New searchlights spring into life and start looking for us. I turn away sharply. Now the wind is at our backs and in less than half-an-hour we are well out over the Channel again.'

Despite arriving over the target area some 30 minutes *after* the first bombs had started falling, all ten of KGr.100's pathfinders got back safely. The same could not be said of 3. *Staffel's* '6N+CL', which failed to return from a raid on Avonmouth four nights later. This was only the third Heinkel loss so far recorded in January. But another three – two from I./KG 1 and one from III./KG 26 – were all lost during a night raid on Southampton on 19/20 January, and all to anti-aircraft fire.

After a further week of bad weather and very little activity, seven minelayers of I./KG 28 (the recently redesignated KGr.126) took off to mine the Bristol Channel during the night of 28/29 January. They ran into sleet and snow showers upon their return to Nantes and three were damaged on landing, at least one being a total write-off. The same *Gruppe* was to lose another machine on the last day of the month when it was shot down by a naval patrol boat at dawn on 31 January after machine gunning fishing trawlers off the Cornish coast. And late that same afternoon an aircraft of I./KG 53 crashed just short of the Sussex coast while retiring at low level from a daylight raid on London.

After another machine of KG 53 was lost three days later – 5. *Staffel's* 'A1+AN' was shot into the Thames Estuary by a Spitfire – the next major flurry of night activity did not occur until the third week of February. This began with a single 'Y-*Gerat*' He 111 of III./KG 26 unloading an SC 2500 'Max' on northwest London during the night of 13/14 February. There were several He 111 losses that night, including a low-flying machine of 4./KG 53 that fell foul of the Parachute and Cable battery defending the bomber base at Watton, in Norfolk.

February's total of 11 Heinkels lost was to rise more than threefold in March as the weather started to improve and the Luftwaffe resumed its aerial onslaught. A series of large-scale attacks was directed against Britain's towns and cities ranging from Cardiff in the west to Hull in the east and from Plymouth in the south to Glasgow in the north. The month's heaviest losses, over a dozen He 111s in all, were suffered on the nights of 12/13 and 13/14 March, which saw two major raids on Liverpool. It is not certain with which unit the author of the following account was flying, nor on which date, but evidence seems to point to his having been a war correspondent aboard one of the visual pathfinders of II./KG 55 that took off from Chartres on the evening of 12 March:

'Like some gigantic black bird of prey, a bomber roars past the dim lights flanking the runway, lifts into the air and is immediately lost to view against the backdrop of dark woods that fringe the field.

'A brief note is recorded in the ops book – "First machine taken off for Liverpool!" Tonight, together with other *Geschwader*, we are to carry out a major raid against this important commercial port on the Mersey.

'The perimeter track is filled with a queue of bombers many hundreds of metres long. One after the other the heavily laden machines taxi out to the take-off point. Our airfield hasn't witnessed such a display of strength for a long time. The night air is filled with the throbbing roar of engines as the dark, slender shapes trundle slowly forward, their cockpits glinting blue in the bright moonlight.

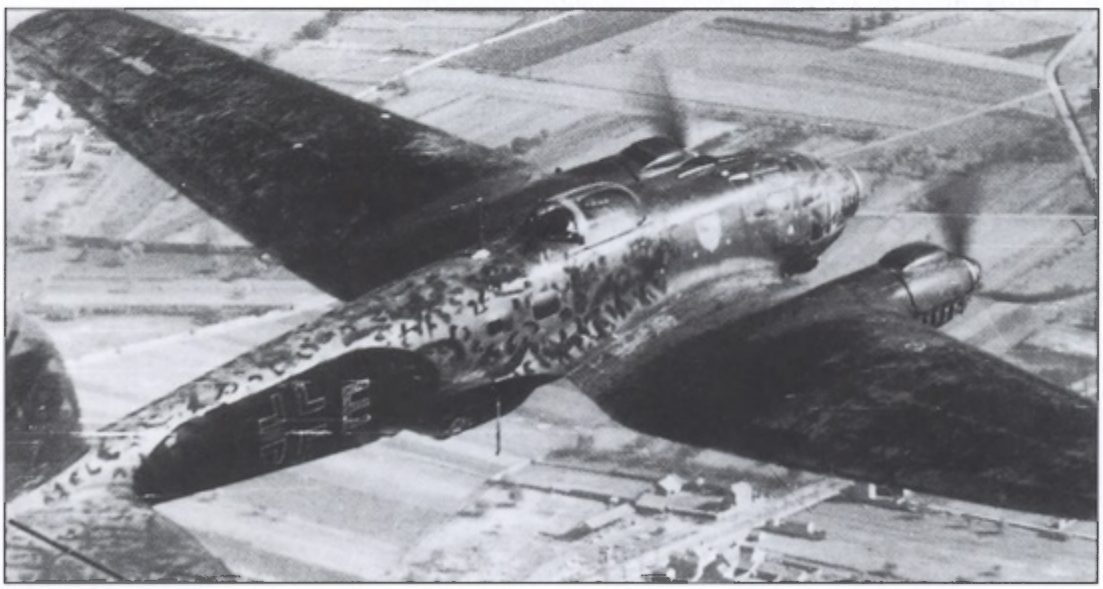
'Over blacked-out towns and villages, over the silver threads of streams and canals, our He 111 races towards the coast. A line of sand dunes, the shaded lights of the last navigational buoys, and then we are alone, suspended between the endless expanse of the North Sea below and the clear starlit sky above. Shortly before the English coast the pilot warns us to keep watch for enemy nightfighters. In the moonlight the English landscape unrolls like a relief map in front of us. Then the navigator glances at his watch – "Ten minutes to target!" There is already a lot of flak about, and searchlight beams are fingering the night sky all around us. But not a single fire or explosion betrays Liverpool's presence somewhere down there in the blackness ahead.

'Carrying a mix of He 111 and incendiaries, we are part of the first wave of tonight's attacking force. It is not until the navigator has taken up his position in the nose and is trying to identify landmarks on the ground below that we see the explosions of the first bombs. They are followed almost immediately by the detonations of a second stick.

'But it is the third stick that produces something quite terrifying. Suddenly and without warning a gigantic pillar of smoke and flames shoots a hundred metres or more into the sky. It expands into an enormous fireball and hangs in the air for what seems like ages, turning the whole sky a deep blood red, before disintegrating and falling slowly back to earth in three entirely separate fiery clusters.

'By now the bombs are raining down. The Mersey is clearly visible, its surface reflecting the many fires taking hold along its banks. The moment our bomb load is released I scramble back along the narrow walkway between the bomb magazines and down into the ventral gondola. I barely have time to crouch down beside the gunner before I see our incendiaries hit. Flames erupt along one-and-a-half kilometres of dock front as they are strewn across warehouses, cranes and silos.

'But this is only the beginning of Liverpool's suffering. We turn for home, and when more than 100 km away can still see the yellow flickering on the horizon behind us as bombs continue to fall on the city.'



Liberally daubed with black distemper on both upper and lower surfaces, this aircraft of KG 55 is well garbed for the coming night's mission

Two of II./KG 55's machines were downed by nightfighters during the 12/13 March mission. Further heavy raids, including two on London, were flown in the week that followed before another spell of bad weather – low cloud, rain and mist in most areas – forced the cancellation of night bombing operations for the rest of the month.

The tempo picked up again in April, which was to see 19 major attacks carried out across the UK. The first of them was launched against Bristol during the night of 3/4 April, but it was the Luftwaffe's return to a battered Coventry five nights later that resulted in the month's first multiple casualties among the participating He 111 *Gruppen.* One of the six machines lost during 8/9 April was 3./KG 55's 'G1+DL', which crashed east of Leicester after being attacked by a Hurricane nightfighter. The crew survived the impact, although three were injured, including the *Gruppenkommandeur* of I./KG 55, Hauptmann Otto Bodemeyer.

The next night marked the close of a chapter for KG 1 when it lost its last He 111 in the west. The *Geschwader's* II. *Gruppe* had retained its idiosyncratic coding system right up until the end, for although the machine that disappeared into the Channel on 9/10 April belonged to 4./KG 1, it bore the markings 'V4+DU'. By now both II. and III./KG 1 were almost fully equipped with Ju 88s, but it was not quite the end of the line yet for Heinkels wearing the 'V4' *Geschwader* code. On 20 March the anti-shipping I./KG 1 had been transferred to Brest, where it was redesignated as III./KG 40 and placed under the command of the *Fliegerführer Atlantik.* The unit's Heinkels, however, retained their original codes. III./KG 40's first recorded loss, suffered on 8/9 April, had gone into the Irish Sea still marked as 'V4+GL'.

Britain's provincial cities had suffered grievously during the first half of April 1941, but then it was London's turn again. The capital was hit hard on both 16/17 and 19/20 April. The latter raid, lasting all of seven hours and involving nearly 800 individual bomber sorties, would prove to be the Luftwaffe's heaviest attack of the war on a British target. It was the only time during the *Blitz* that Göring's forces managed to deliver over 1000 tonnes of bombs on a single target in a single night – far more than in the devastating 'firestorm' raid of 29/30 December 1940 that had gutted the City of London. And this time the attack was aimed not at the business heart of the capital, but at the all-important docks lining the Thames downstream of Tower Bridge, as one participant describes;

'Our weather boys have done a magnificent job. Every layer of cloud, every patch of clear sky has been forecast. We have already been flying blind for quite a while and now, still some 30 km from the city of seven million inhabitants, we plunge into an even thicker mountain of mist that rears high into the heavens in front of us.

'But this particular mountain of mist is opalescent. It's alive. Alive with light – a ghostly, shimmering flickering light as hundreds of searchlight beams probe and filter into its innermost recesses. We find ourselves bathed in a milky glow that throws the interior of our machine into sharp relief. Every detail is clearly visible. The fingers of light also act both as signposts and as direction indicators. We're getting close to the target!

'We emerge from the reflected haze, and the first thing we become aware of are the stars glinting coldly against the velvety blackness of the night sky. But they quickly pale into insignificance as the first of the searchlight

beams strokes the soot-black undersides of our machine. These are the master searchlights, whose powerful columns of light are roving erratically – reeling drunkenly, you might almost say – to and fro through the darkness, never still, never stopping. The one that brushed us for an instant has already moved on. The high altitude at which we are approaching our objective makes us difficult to spot.

'Hundreds of such beams encircle the giant metropolis. And within this restless palisade of light lies the city itself. Dark and invisible, it tries to hide, not wanting to be seen. But its presence is betrayed by numerous patches of glowing red and bright yellow. These are the fires that have been burning now for days and nights past. Not even recent heavy rain has been able to extinguish them.

'With each passing second the patches of colour become more clearly defined as they take on shape and form. Now we can make out whole streets on fire. Order is emerging out of the chaos. We can see how the blazing threads of thoroughfares intersect, fork and join to form a fiery living map of the enemy capital's southern suburbs.

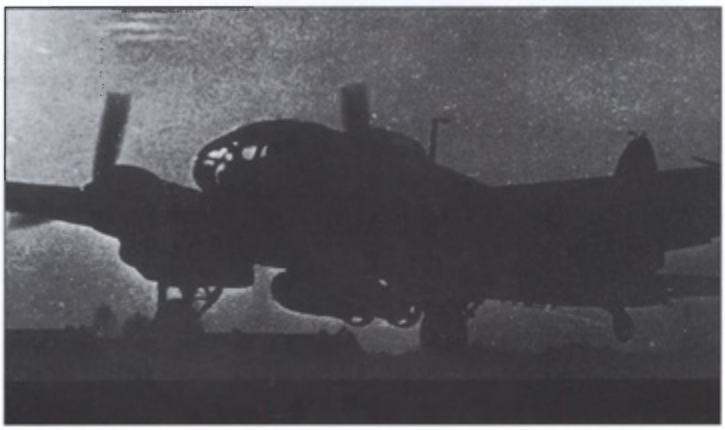
'For a while we attempt to weave our way through the probing beams of light and bursts of heavy flak. Every now and again shrapnel rattles against the metal skin of our machine. We straighten up as we near our assigned target. But to find it we will have to go lower, into the dense web of light flak with its glowing green, red and yellow pearls of tracer.

'Another searchlight leeches onto us as we descend into the inferno. We screw our eyes into slits as we peer into the glare, desperately trying to fix our exact position above the sprawling mass of the city. The roar of our engines drowns out the noise of the flak bursting around us. And suddenly there it is, the "U"-bend in the Thames, and on its northern banks our target – London Docks!

'The slight ripple ruffling the surface of the river reflects the blood-red flames of the fires already burning along its length. We release the first part of our bomb load and make a wide turn to come in again. Tower Bridge is silhouetted against the raging conflagration beyond. As we let go our second heavy bomb, we can see the effects the first one has had. Broken walls and shattered buildings are visible. We have hit the southwestern corner of the docks near the lock gates. The second bomb explodes in the centre of the south basin and now we unload our

Another pile of shattered but still identifiable Heinkel wreckage. This is one of the larger pieces of III./KG 26's 'Y-*Gerat*'-equipped '1H+ET' to fall to earth after it broke apart in the air following an attack by a Defiant nightfighter over Hertfordshire on the evening of 8 April 1941

An armourer sets the fuse for the second of the two SC 1000 bombs to be loaded onto the external bomb racks of this He 111H



A pair of 2204-lb SC 1000 bombs was a standard external load for the He 111, as seen here on a machine silhouetted against the setting sun as it takes off on another night raid

incendiaries on the eastern half of our target, which is separated from the western part by a channel.

'Some of the firebombs land in a small railway siding. Burning fiercely, they light up the surrounding area. Walls and buildings, railway lines, cranes and loading ramps – here, everything is of importance, every warehouse packed with essential war materiel! In this huge expanse of docks every target is vital to the enemy's war effort. Our sense of satisfaction at having completed two successful bombing runs is heightened by the knowledge that we have not hit any residential districts.

'Before climbing back up into the heavy flak zone, we circle the dock area one last time to assess the damage our incendiaries have done. Fires have already taken hold inside many of the warehouses. Small flames are licking out of the upper stories and spreading to the gable roofs. This is the work of the bombs that have found their mark. Others are burning themselves out on the bare concrete of the nearby roadways and quaysides like so many bright but useless bonfires. Altogether we have spent nearly ten minutes over the target area.'

The Luftwaffe continued to concentrate its efforts against Britain's ports and coastal cities for the remainder of April. By month-end Heinkel losses had risen to well over 50. A similar number would be lost in May, all but a handful of them during the first ten days of the month alone. A series of raids against provincial targets during this period ended in yet another major assault on London.

For over six hours during the night of 10/11 May the capital was pounded by more than 500 bombers. Widespread damage was caused, but this time the He 111 *Gruppen* had to pay a higher price than just the two machines of KG 4 that had been lost during the raid of 19/20 April. Ten bombers failed to return, and all of them were Heinkels. At least half of their number had been claimed by RAF nightfighters – a telling illustration of just how far Britain's nocturnal defences had progressed since the start of the *Blitz* seven months earlier.

Elsewhere, two other machines had been lost on this 10/11 May. One was a reconnaissance Ju 88 that went into the sea off Holland. The other was a twin-engined Bf 110 that crashed in Scotland after its sole occupant had taken to his parachute. The real story behind the solo, one-way flight to Scotland by Rudolf Hess, the Deputy *Führer* of the Third Reich, still gives rise to conjecture. Most are agreed that he was on a peace-seeking mission. But was it with Hitler's tacit agreement, or did he act entirely of his own accord – in other words, was it one last attempt by Hitler to achieve peace with the west, or a forlorn gamble by a deluded mind?

Whatever the truth, the reality was that after the night of 10/11 May there was a marked reduction in the scale of Luftwaffe attacks on the UK (although officialdom attributed this more prosaically to an unexpected return of poor weather). A medium-sized raid on Birmingham resulted

in the loss of a single III./KG 55 machine to a Beaufighter during the night of 16/17 May, after which the scene of the action – such as there was – moved westwards. Among the last three Heinkels lost in May was an aircraft of 4./KG 27 that bellied in on a mist-shrouded hillside near the Dorset coast on the evening of 22 May. What made '1G+ZM' slightly special was that it was one of the few He 111H-8 variants to be produced, and was equipped with a large frontal framework, stretching from wingtip to wingtip, which was designed to act as a combined balloon-cable fender and cutting device.

One of the ten He 111 casualties of the 10/11 May night raid on London. After the pilot had pulled off this creditable forced-landing near Ashford, in Kent, the five wounded crewmembers of 5./KG 53's 'A1+JN' were helped out of their damaged machine by local civilians

By this time, however, RAF nightfighters were proving a far greater menace than any balloon barrage. The two aircraft of KG 27 that failed to return from a night raid on Liverpool on 31 May had both fallen victim to Beaufighters. And it was another Beaufighter that claimed the 8./KG 4 machine lost during an attack on Birmingham five nights later.

Apart from participating in some small to medium-scale raids such as those on Liverpool and Birmingham mentioned previously, the bulk of the Heinkel *Kampfgruppen* were enjoying the lull in operational activity and using the time to rest, recuperate and make good their recent losses. Most assumed that they were preparing for round two of the Battle of Britain, a renewal of the daylight air offensive to be launched in the high summer of 1941. Few, if any, had the slightest notion of what actually awaited them – transfer eastwards and the invasion of the Soviet Union.

The majority of the Heinkel missions flown during the final two weeks in the west prior to the start of the Russian campaign were undertaken by machines of the specialised anti-shipping *Gruppen*. The six losses they suffered in the process all came down in the sea. One of the first was an aircraft of 4./KG 40 that disappeared near the Faroe Islands during a maritime patrol on 5 June. The last was a minelayer of 2./KG 28 downed by an armed trawler off the coast of Cornwall on 20 June.

He 111H-8 '1G+ZM' of 4./KG 27 is seen here spread-eagled on a Dorset hillside on the morning of 23 May 1941 after its involuntary arrival the evening before. The bomber's elaborate balloon-cable fender aroused sufficient interest for the machine to be taken to RAE Farnborough for further examination

The main action inland during this period had been a brief series of minor raids by KGr.100. Its mission to Chatham on 13/14 June had cost the *Gruppe* two of its number. Another failed to return from an attack on the Bristol Aeroplane Company's factory at Filton the following night. And a raid on the Gloster Aircraft works at Hucclecote on 16/17 June resulted in the loss of two more. All five of these final He 111 casualties of the night *Blitz* had fallen victim to Beaufighters.

POST-1941 POSTSCRIPT

The invasion of the Soviet Union at 0415 hrs Eastern European time on 22 June 1941 foretold the end of the Heinkel's career as a bomber in the west. But the suffering of Britain's cities at the hands of the He 111 was not quite over yet, for although ten of the Luftwaffe's Heinkel *Kampfgruppen* were now ranged along the eastern front, six were still based in northwest Europe. And three of these – I. and III./KG 4 and KGr.100 – would continue their sporadic night-raiding activities for another month.

On 24/25 June, for example, two machines of III./KG 4 and one from KGr.100 were reported missing over the UK. Only a handful of losses were then suffered during the next fortnight. But 7/8 July's raid on Southampton resulted in three more casualties. All were brought down by RAF fighters, two disappearing into the Channel. Three nights later 8./KG 4's '5J+ES' also went into the sea – off Hull.

And this really did mark the end of the Heinkel's role in the night *Blitz*, for just over a week later, on 19 July, the three *Gruppen* were ordered eastwards. I. and III./KG 4 went to Königsberg, in East Prussia, for rest and re-equipment, and KGr.100 – the 'X-*Gerät*' devices removed from their machines – to Terespol, in Poland, Their departure left just the anti-shipping He 111s of II. and III./KG 40 and I./KG 26 in the west, the former duo still under the command of the *Fliegerführer Atlantik*, the latter based in Norway as part of *Luftflotte* 5. And whereas I./KG 26 was shortly to be transferred to Finland, the two KG 40 *Gruppen* continued to harass Britain's coastal shipping until the spring of 1942, by which time both had relinquished the last of their Heinkels (for Do 217s and Fw 200s, respectively).

Spring 1942 also signalled the start of the *'Baedeker'* raids, so named after the famous German tourist guidebooks, and aimed specifically at Britain's cultural and cathedral cities. *'Baedeker'* was the latest manifestation of Hitler's insatiable thirst for revenge at all costs (this time in response to the RAF's damaging raid on the ancient Hanseatic port city of Lübeck on the night of 28/29 March 1942).

Luftflotte 3 cobbled together what units it could in order to comply with the *Führer's* demands for

With the evening sun low on the horizon behind them, anti-shipping He 111s head north into St George's Channel

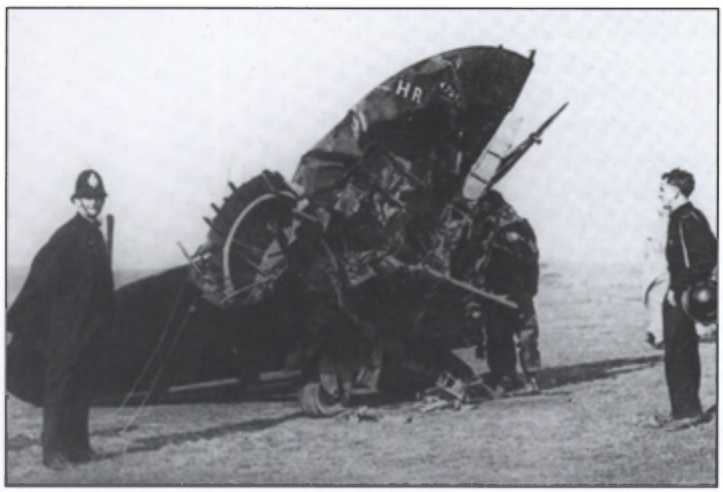
'similar terror attacks of a retaliatory nature'. Among them were the Heinkels of IV./KG 4 and IV./KG 55, both currently stationed in France. At this stage of the war a *Kampfgeschwader's* IV. *Gruppe*, usually based far from any fighting front, served its parent unit as a kind of operational training wing, preparing newly qualified crews for combat duty. And, in similar fashion to RAF Bomber Command's operational training units, they were sometimes called upon to make up numbers when a maximum effort mission was being planned. The two *Gruppens'* participation in *'Baedeker'*, however, resulted in little more than the loss of at least four of their own machines.

In order to augment *'Baedeker's'* cultural offensive with attacks on targets of a more specific – and militarily justifiable – nature, a specialised pathfinder *Staffel* was also temporarily added to *Luftflotte* 3's order of battle. In November 1941, shortly after commencing operations on the eastern front, the original KGr.100 of the night *Blitz* era had been elevated to the status of *Geschwader*. And it was KG 100's experimental *Erprobungskommando* XY ('X/Y-*Gerat*' Trials Detachment) that was selected for transfer to France (where it was incorrectly identified by British Intelligence as 7./KG 100). The unit led a number of raids on the UK during May and June 1942, but it too was to suffer several losses in the process.

The spurious 7./KG 100's first two recorded casualties both fell victim to Beaufighters during the 7/8 May 1942 night raid on Chatham. Just over two weeks later, on 23 May, a third He 111 was lost when leading a small-scale daylight attack on Avonmouth. In poor visibility, and while trying to avoid the attentions of another of the RAF's seemingly omnipresent Beaufighters, '6N+FR' crashed into a hill near Shaftesbury, in Dorset. All five crewmembers were killed, including the unit's *Kommandofuhrer* (aka the *Staffelkapitan*), Hauptmann Siegfried Langer.

By June 1942 *'Baedeker'* was rapidly running out of steam. But the following month saw the arrival in the west of yet another He 111 *Kampfgruppe*. III./KG 53 had been withdrawn from the Russian front in January 1942 for rest and re-equipment. After six months in Germany it was declared operational again. Instead of returning eastwards, however, it was transferred to Chartres, in France.

One of the 'EKdo.XY' He 111H-6 pathfinders specifically brought in to bolster the *'Baedeker'* offensive, '6N+HR' crashed into power cables near Brighton after being attacked by a Beaufighter in the early hours of 8 May 1942. Once again, a British bobby is on hand to guard the remains



Between 25 July and 15 August 1942 this *Gruppe* flew several lengthy missions, usually of some six or seven hours' duration, which took them west to east across the width of Britain – from St George's Channel to the North Sea – before landing in Holland, refuelling, and returning to Chartres. The He 111 was by this time far too slow a machine for operations of this kind, and the crews rated their chances of survival as 'slim to non-existent'. A number of aircraft were indeed lost, three failing to return from the raid on Swansea Docks during the night

of 4/5 August alone. Among the missing was recently appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* Major Walter Brautkuhl. It was no doubt with some relief that the survivors learned of their transfer back to Russia in mid-August.

At about that same time KG 100's *Erprobungskommando* XY was officially redesignated to become 15./KG 6. It was still operating in the specialised pathfinder role, although there was little evidence of pathfinding expertise on the night of 7/8 September 1942 when one of the *Staffel's* machines, reportedly briefed to attack Bedford, bombed North Weald instead and then almost immediately fell foul of a Havoc nightfighter before it could make the Essex coast. 15./KG 6's '6N+ER' may thereby have unwittingly become the very last He 111 to be shot down over Britain during World War 2.

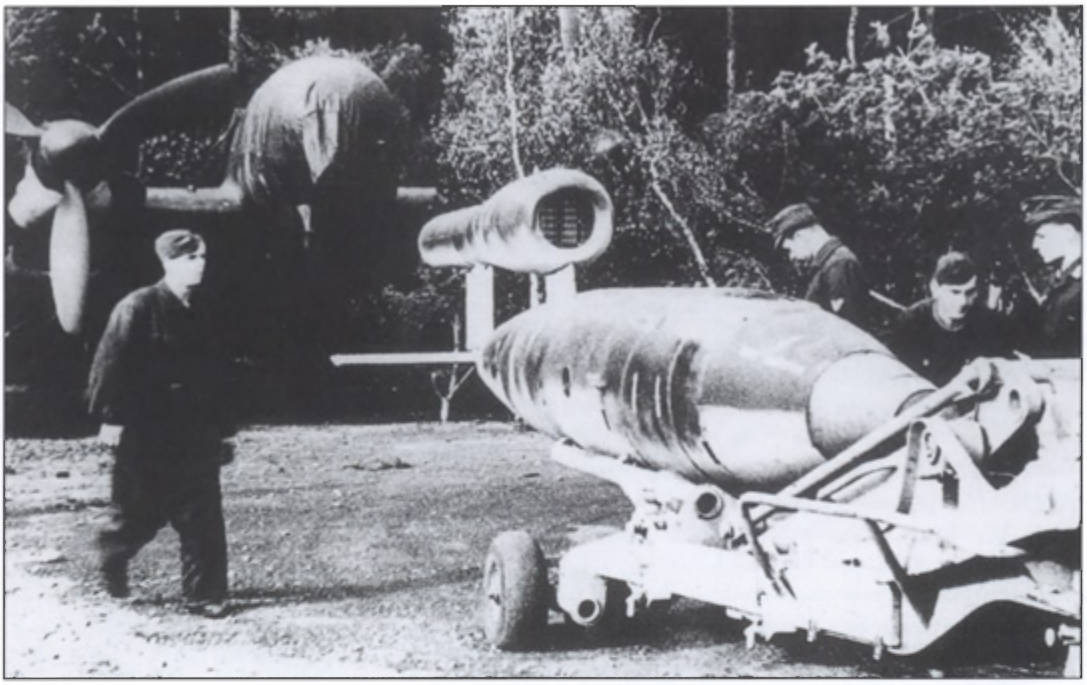
For the remainder of 1942 and all of 1943 the skies of Britain remained Heinkel-free. The next series of bombing raids directed against the UK was code-named Operation *'Steinbock'* ('Capricorn'), although the British quickly dubbed this renewed offensive the 'Little Blitz'. Launched towards the end of January 1944, *'Steinbock's'* initial order of battle contained no He 111 units whatsoever. But by mid-March the torpedo-bombers of I./KG 26 had for some reason been added to it.

Previously based in southern France, this *Gruppe* had recently sustained heavy losses in action against the Anglo-American landings in Italy. With its strength now reduced to just 12 crews and 11 serviceable machines, it is not known what contribution – if any – I./KG 26 made to *'Steinbock'*. But it cannot have been significant, as there are no records of either aircraft losses or personnel casualties over the UK between March and May 1944, by which latter date the *Gruppe* had been withdrawn to Denmark for conversion to the Ju 88.

'Steinbock' slowly petered out just as the *'Baedeker'* raids had done two years earlier. But Britain was now about to be subjected to one final onslaught from the air. It represented the culmination of Hitler's life-long obsession with retaliation. This time, however, the aerial aggressors would not be conventional bombers, but the Fi 103 pilotless flying bomb and the A4 rocket. These two weapons were more commonly known as the V1 and the V2, the 'V' standing unequivocally for *Vergeltung* (Reprisal), pure and simple.

Although the British had no immediate defence against the supersonic V2 rocket, a combination of balloon barrages, anti-aircraft batteries and RAF fighters did account for hundreds of V1s. But the only sure method of stopping their attacks entirely would be for the Normandy invasion forces to advance eastwards along the Channel coast and capture their launch sites. The Germans were equally well aware of this fact. As a consequence, they had already begun to experiment with air-launched V1s. And the machine they chose as the carrier aircraft was the venerable He 111.

The first Heinkel *Gruppe* to air-launch the V1 operationally was III./KG 3, which, prior to its recall to the Reich in the early spring of 1944, had been flying Ju 88s on the eastern front. After converting to Heinkels and undergoing a lengthy period of training, III./KG 3 moved forward to Venlo, in Holland, launching its first V1s against London on the night of 7/8 July 1944.



NCO technicians (right) set the 'log' of a V1 before the 'black men' of the groundcrew attach it to the machine of KG 53 seen in its camouflaged dispersal bay in the background

Initially averaging only a dozen serviceable aircraft, the *Gruppe's* efforts were at first little more than pinpricks. But then, in August, an entire *Geschwader* was likewise withdrawn from the Russian front. This was KG 53, which had operated Heinkels since before the war. The return to Germany was to be the end of the road for I./KG 53, however. It was transferred to East Prussia and there disbanded in September. In the meantime II. and III./KG 53 had taken up station in Silesia and started practising low-level night-flying over the Baltic in preparation for their new role as V1 launchers.

References differ as to when KG 53 actually commenced operations. Dates quoted range from mid-September to late November. Somewhere midway between the two seems to be the most likely, as this was when III./KG 3 filled the *Geschwader's* now vacant I. *Gruppe* slot by being redesignated I./KG 53. The Heinkel that was forced to ditch in the North Sea on 5 October was coded '5K+FS' and still officially listed as an aircraft of III./KG 3, while the first crew of the 'new' I./KG 53 to be reported missing failed to return from a launch flight on 21 October.

A *Kampfgeschwader's* normal establishment was approximately 100 aircraft, but in mid-October 1944 KG 53's three *Gruppen* fielded just 24 serviceable machines between them (although this figure had risen to 85 by mid-December). The *Geschwader's* nine component *Staffeln* were based on separate airfields along Germany's North Sea coastal belt stretching roughly in an arc from the Danish border down to the area west of Wilhelmshaven (see Appendix).

As to the operations themselves, on average, about 25 individual sorties were flown per night – weather permitting, of course – each lasting from three to five hours depending on where an aircraft was based. The common departure point for all Staffeln was the southern tip of the Dutch island of Texel. It was here that the navigator would activate the

so-called 'log'. This was a fairly crude 'kilometre-countdown' device that had been preset prior to take-off according to the aircraft's planned route and the forecast weather.

After a laborious flight across the North Sea made at low level to keep below enemy radar, the pilot would climb to 500 metres shortly before reaching a predetermined (but constantly changing) launch point out over the Thames Estuary some 70 km to the east of London. There, he would point the nose of his aircraft towards the target.

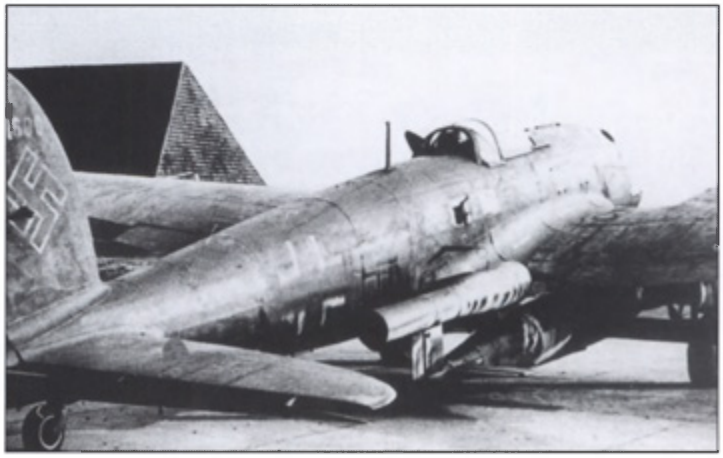
When the log reached zero the V1 would be released. While the Heinkel quickly dived away back into the darkness below to escape the tell-tale exhaust glare of the V1's pulse-jet engine – one crew described this moment as like being aboard 'a brightly lit omnibus driving along a foggy street' – the missile's own pre-calibrated log would take over, counting down the time remaining to target. Although basic, it was estimated that this system gave a radius of accuracy of about 25 km – acceptable enough against a target as large as London.

Even so, missions of this kind, more often than not flown in marginal weather conditions, demanded a lot from the young and inadequately trained crews that by now made up the bulk of the *Geschwader*. Never a sprightly aircraft at the best of times, the He 111 was even more sluggish and unresponsive when encumbered by a V1 slung beneath its right wing between fuselage and starboard engine. If discovered, it was easy prey for any patrolling nightfighter. Few pilots possessed the experience of the veteran Leutnant Georg Ackermann of the *Gruppenstab* II./KG 53, who had flown 36 missions over Britain during the night *Blitz* of 1940/41, and would now go on to add 14 successful air launches of the V1.

It is not known exactly how many Heinkels went down in the North Sea, or were destroyed in take-off and landing accidents. Some accounts maintain that KG 53's losses were 'cripplingly high'. But casualty returns list just over a dozen crews killed or missing in the ten weeks from 21 October to 31 December 1944. During this period the *Geschwader* took its eyes off London only once, launching some 40 V1s against the Manchester area in the early hours of Christmas Eve, 24 December – 31 of the missiles reportedly crashed to earth across a wide swathe of northern England from Northamptonshire to County Durham.

But by the New Year this final aerial assault on London was also drawing to a close. One of KG 53's last losses was the machine piloted by Hauptmann Siegfried Jessen, the *Kapitän* of 9. *Staffel*, which was shot down by a nightfighter intruder while coming in to land back at Schleswig early on 5 January.

Nine days later, at 0213 hrs on the morning of 14 January 1945 to be precise, the last air-launched V1 to hit Britain came down on a row of houses in Romford, Essex, and the Heinkel He 111 bomber's part in the air war in the west was finally at an end.



'All flying bombed up and ready to go!' An He 111H-16 of KG 53 waits for darkness before setting out across the North Sea to air-launch its V1 against London. It was aircraft such as this that flew the last Heinkel bomber sorties of the air war in the west

APPENDICES

REPRESENTATIVE He 111 BOMBER STRENGTHS

A) 1 SEPTEMBER 1939, POLAND

Luftflotte 1 (North)

1. Fliegerdivision		**Base**	**Type**	**Est-Serv**
Stab KG 1	GenMaj Kessler	Kolberg	He 111H	9-9
I./KG 1	Oberstlt Krauss	Kolberg	He 111E	38-34
I./KG 152	Maj Kosch	Pinnow-Plathe	He 111H	37-34
Stab KG 26	GenMaj Sieburg	Gabbert	He 111H	6-5
II./KG 26	Maj von Bushe	Gabbert	He 111H	35-31
I./KG 53	Maj von Mehnert	Schonfeld/Crossinsee	He 111H	31-31
Stab KG 27	Oberst Behrendt	Werneuchen	He 111P	6-5
I./KG 27	Oberstlt Graumnitz	Werneuchen	He 111P	35-31
II./KG 27	Maj de Salengre Drabbe	Neuhardenberg	He 111P	36-32
III./KG 27	Maj Nielsen	Konigsberg/Neumark	He 111P	36-33
Luftwaffen-Lehrdivision				
Stab LG 1	Oberst Dr Krauss	Neuhausen	He 111H	9-8
II./LG 1	Maj Dobratz	Powunden	He 111H	39-34
III./LG 1	Maj Dr Bormann	Prowehren	He 111H	39-32

Luftfllotte 4 (South)

2.Fliegerdivision				
Stab KG 4	Oberst Fiebig	Oels	He 111P	6-6
I./KG 4	Oberst Maier	Langenau	He 111P	27-27
II./KG 4	Maj Erdmann	Oels	He 111P	30-30
III./KG 4	Maj Evers	Langenau	He 111P	33-32
Total				**452-414**

B) 9 APRIL 1940, NORWAY

Luftflotte 2

X. Fliegerkorps				
Stab KG 26	Oberstlt Fuchs	Lübeck-Blankensee	He 111H	9-9
I./KG 26	Oberstlt Ahlefeld	Marx	He 111H	36-30
II./KG 26	Hptm Vetter	Lübeck-Blankensee	He 111H	35-29
III./KG 26	Maj von Lossberg	Lubeck-Blankensee	He 111H	35-20
KGr.100	Hptm von Casimir	Nordholz	He 111H	27-18
Stab KG 4	Oberstlt Fiebig	Fassberg	He 111P	8-5
I./KG 4	Oberstlt Rath	Perleberg	He 111P	36-26
II./KG 4	Maj *Frhr.*von Massenbach	Fassberg	He 111P	36-32
III./KG 4*	Maj Neudorffer	Luneburg	He 111P	32-17
Totals				**254-186**

C) 10 MAY 1940, FRANCE AND THE LOW COUNTRIES

Oberbefehlshaber der Luftwaffe

KGr.126	Hptm Stein	Marx	He 111H/B	37-24
3./KIFlGr.906	Hptm Klumper	Norderney	He 111B	6-6

Luftflotte 2(North)

***Fliegerkorps* z.b.V. 2**

Stab KG 4	Oberst Fiebig	Fassberg	He 111P	8-7
I./KG 4	Oberstlt Roth	Gutersloh	He 111H	36-24
II./KG 4	Maj *Frhr* von Massenbach	Fassberg	He 111P/D	36-18
III./KG 4*	Hptm Bloedorn	Delmenhorst	He 111P	23-12
Stab KG 54	Oberst Lackner	Quakenbruck	He 111P/D	7-4
I./KG 54	Oberstlt Hohne	Quaakenbruck	He 111P	36-33
II./KG 54	Oberstlt Koster	Varrelbusch	He 111P	29-26
III./KG 54	Maj Haring	Vechta	He 111P	35-27

IV. Fliegerkorps

Stab LG 1*	Oberst Bulowius	Dusseldorf	He 111H	5-4
I./LG 1	Hptm Kern	Delmenhorst	He 111H	30-22
II./LG 1*	Maj Dobratz	Hannover-Langenhagen	He 111H	26-18
III./LG 1*	Maj Dr Bormann	Wesendorf	He 111H	12-5
Stab KG 27	Oberst Behrendt	Hannover-Langenhagen	He 111 P/D	6-5
I./KG 27	Oberstlt von Falkenstein	Hannover-Langenhagen	He 111 P	36-25
II./KG 27	Maj Tamm	Delmenhorst	He 111P	35-25
III./KG 27	Hptm Schirmer	Wunstorf	He 111P	38-32

Luftflotte 3(South)

I. Fliegerkorps

Stab KG 1	Oberst Exss	Giessen	He 111H	5-3
I./KG 1	Maj Maier	Giessen	He 111H	34-25
II./KG 1	Maj Kosch	Kirtorf	He 111H	35-23
III./KG 1	Maj Schnelle	Ettinghausen	He 111H	33-27
III./KG 28	Maj von Hoffmann	Brachtr	He 111P	36-30

II. Fliegerkorps

Stab KG 53	Oberst Stahl	Roth	He 111H	7-4
I./KG 53	Oberstlt Mehnert	Roth	He 111H	36-21
II./KG 53	Oberstlt Kohlbach	Oedheim	He 111H	36-24
III./KG 53	Maj Rohrbacher	Schwabisch Hall	He 111H	36-26

V. Fliegerkorps

Stab KG 51*	Oberst Kammhuber	Landsberg/Lech	He 111H	1-1
I./KG 51*	Maj Schulz-Heyn	Lechfeld	He 111H	36-18
III./KG 51	Maj Kind	Landsberg/Lech	He 111H	39-29
Stab KG 55	Oberst Stoeckl	Leipheim	He 111P	6-5
I./KG 55	Maj Marienfeld	Neuburg/Donau	He 111P	35-25
II./KG 55	Oberstlt von Lachemair	Leipheim	He 111P	36-24
III./KG 55	Maj Schemmel	Gablingen	He 111P	36-17

* Also equipped with Ju 88s

Führer der Luft West (Naval Aviation Units)

Stab KuFlGr. 806

2./KuFlGr. 806	Hptm Hahne	Uetersen	He 111J	10-10
3./KüFlGr. 806	Hptm Linke	Uetersen	He 111J	10-6
Totals				**908-635**

D) 13 AUGUST 1940, BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Luftflotte 2 (East)

I. Fliegerkorps

Stab KG 1	Oberst Exss	Amiens-Glisy	He 111H	4-4
I./KG 1	Maj Maier	Montdidier	He 111H	27-23
II./KG 1	Maj Kosch	Amiens-Glisy	He 111H	31-29
III./KG 1	Maj Fanelsa	Rosieres-en-Santerre	He 111H	32-15

II. Fliegerkorps

Stab KG 53	Oberst Stahl	Lille-Nord	He 111H	5-1
I./KG 53	Maj Kaufmann	Lille-Nord	He 111H	28-27
II./KG 53	Oberstlt Kohlbach	Lille-Nors	He 111H	28-15
III./KG 53	Maj Edler von Braun	Lille-Nord	He 111H	33-24

9. Fliegerdivision

Stab KG 4	Oberst Rath	Soesterberg	He 111P	6-5
I./KG 4	Hptm Meissner	Soesterberg	He 111H	30-12
II./KG 4	Maj Dr Wolff	Eindhoven	He 111P	31-25
KGr.100	Hptm Aschenbrenner	Vannes-Meucon	He 111H	41-19
KGr.126	Maj Schulz	Marx	He 111H	34-8

Luftflotte 3 (West)

V. Fliegerkorps

Stab KG 55	Oberst Stoeckl	Villacoublay	He 111P	4-1
I./KG 55	Maj Korte	Dreux	He 111P/H	39-35
II./KG 55	Maj Kless	Chartres	He 111P	38-28
III./KG 55	Maj Schemmell	Villacoublay	He 111P	38-33

IV. Fliegerkorps

Stab KG 27	Oberst Behrendt	Tours	He 111P	5-1
I./KG 27	Maj Ulbricht	Tours	He 111P/H	33-22
II./KG 27	Maj Schlichting	Dinard-Bourges	He 111P/H	34-21
III./KG 27	Maj Speck von Sternburg	Rennes	He 111P/D	31-23

Luftflotte 5 (North)

X.Fliegerkorps

Stab KG 26	Oberst Fuchs	Stavanger	He 111P	6-6
I./KG 26	Maj Busch	Stavanger	He 111H	30-29
III./KG 26	Maj von Lossberg	Stavanger	He 111H	26-26
Totals				**614-432**

E) 23 NOVEMBER 1944, AIR-LAUNCHED V1 OFFENSIVE

Luftwaffenkommando (West)

3. Fliegerdivision

Stab KG 53	OberstIt Packrandt	Bad Zwischenahn	He 111H-22	2-1
I./KG 53	Maj Vetter	Varrelbusch		
1./KG 53	Maj Vetter (acting)	Varrelbusch	He 111H-22	29-18
2./KG 53	Hptm Zander	Ahlhorn		
3./KG 53	Hptm Brandt	Vechta		
II./KG 53	Maj Wittmann	Bad Zwischenahn		
4./KG 53	Hptm Rehfeld	Bad Zwischenahn	He 111H-22	23-16
5./KG 53	Hptm Schier	Jever		
6./KG 53	Hptm Bautz	Wittmundhaven		
III./KG 53	Maj Allmendinger	Eggebeck		
7./KG 53	Hptm Bausek	Leck	He 111H-22	29-20
8./KG 53	Hptm Dengg	Schleswig		
9./KG 53	Hptm Jessen	Eggebeck		
Totals				**83-55**

COLOUR PLATES

1

He 111B '25.3' of VB/88, *Legion Condor*, Seville, March 1937

One of the first four Heinkels shipped to Spain, '25.3' (aka 'Pedro 1') was the personal mount of Oberleutnant von Moreau, the *Staffelkapitän* of the experimental VB/88. The 'Diving Eagle with Bomb' motif on the black fuselage disc – believed to have been introduced as a personal marking by von Moreau – was later adopted as the badge of 4.K/88. Later still it became the *Geschwader* emblem of the wartime KG 53 *'Legion Condor'*.

2

He 111E '25.81' of 2.K/88, *Legion Condor*, Ebro Front, December 1938

From about aircraft '25.30' onwards, the He 111s in Spain wore the standard pre-war Luftwaffe three-tone splinter camouflage scheme depicted here (and many, if not all, of the surviving earlier machines were repainted to match as opportunity occurred). This particular aircraft served with 2.K/88, as witness the *Staffel* badge on the nose (a shield bearing a Luftwaffe eagle superimposed on a bomb) and the red spinners. The former, incidentally, was later used in amended form as the emblem of 4./KG 53 during the early months of the World War 2.

3

He 111E 'V4+AH' of 1./KG 1 'Hindenburg', Kolberg, September 1939

Redesignated from IV./KG 152 on 1 May 1939, and the only *Kampfgruppe* still equipped with the He 111E upon the outbreak of war, I./KG 1's machines displayed a unique mix of early three-colour splinter camouflage and definitive (i.e. post-May 1939) four-character alphanumeric fuselage unit codes.

4

He 111H-2 'V4+H13' of 3./KG 152 'Hindenburg', Herzberg, September 1939

Conversely, I./KG 1's sister *Gruppe* in Poland, I./KG 152 – which had re-equipped with the He 111H just one month prior to the outbreak of hostilities – flew Heinkels in standard two-tone green finish, but bearing hybrid fuselage codes consisting of the new 'V4' *Geschwader* designator coupled with the 'last three' of their previous (pre-May 1939) five character codes. This practice ended after I./KG 152's redesignation as II./KG 1 on 18 September 1939.

5

He 111H-3 'V4+LK' of 2./KG 1 'Hindenburg', Amiens-Glisy, February 1941

By the spring of 1940 KG 1 had evolved into a standard three-*Gruppe Geschwader*, had sorted out its marking anomalies and was wearing regulation codes – only to hide them again under a coat of washable black distemper once committed to the night *Blitz* of 1940/41. On 20 March 1941 I./KG 1 departed Amiens-Glisy for Brest, where the *Gruppe* was quickly redesignated to become III./KG 40.

6
He 111J '33+E25' of 5./KG 253 'General Wever', Erfurt, January 1939
This bomber exhibits a textbook combination of pre-war camouflage finish and fuselage unit code markings. The latter read from left to right as follows – '33' is the KG 253 *Geschwader* designator, 'E' is the individual aircraft letter, '2' denotes II. (Second) *Gruppe* and '5' is for 5. (Fifth) *Staffel*. The only deviation from the norm on this He 111 is the all-green vertical tail, where the previous red bar/ white disc background to the swastika (see profile 10) has been overpainted in accordance with Marking Regulation No 5 of 1 January 1939.

7
He 111P '5J+FH' of 1./KG 4 'General Wever', Langenau, September 1939
Wearing standard finish for the opening weeks of the war, with white individual aircraft letter and spinners signifying 1. *Staffel* and I. *Gruppe*, respectively, KG 4's '5J+FH' is slightly out of the ordinary in that the bomber combines an early style small-dimensioned, narrow-bordered fuselage cross with a tail swastika located on the vertical fin.

8
He 111H '1H+NM' of 4./KG 26 *'Löwen'*, Westerland, October 1939
Another aircraft from the early days of the war, this example has the tail swastika centred on the rudder hinge line as specified in the above-mentioned regulations of 1 January 1939. Having participated in the Polish campaign, II./KG 26 was transferred to the North Sea area. '1H+NM' was one of the two machines that forced-landed in Denmark (and was set on fire by its crew) after an abortive attack on vessels of the Home Fleet on 9 October 1939.

9
He 111H-5 '1H+GR' of 7./KG 26 *'Löwen'*, Poix-Nord, December 1940
Sporting the usual black distemper associated with the night raids of winter 1940/41, this aircraft of III./KG 26 is depicted carrying an SC 2500 'Max', the largest bomb to be dropped on Britain during the Blitz. The weapon's normal pale blue finish has also been given a liberal coat of distemper to render it less conspicuous. Note the small individual letter 'G' on the leading edge of the Heinkel's port wing.

10
He 111B-2 '71+H26' of 6./KG 157 'Boelcke', Wunstorf, May 1937
In the winter of 1936/37 KG 157 'Boelcke' became the first *Geschwader* to receive He 111s, and this machine of II. *Gruppe* displays standard finish and markings of this early period (note the 'last two' of the fuselage code repeated under the port wingtip inboard of the cross). The ventral gunner's retractable 'dustbin' – shown here lowered – was commonly known as the *'Topf'* ('Pot') in Luftwaffe parlance.

11
He 111P '1G+BL' of 3./KG 27 'Boelcke', Hannover-Langenhagen, April 1940
Many air- and groundcrews of I./KG 27 whiled away the monotony of the 'Phoney War' period by painting elaborate personal motifs on their machines. Some clearly referred to a home town, but the meaning of others, such as this big cat with a bomb in its jaws sported by 3. *Staffel's* 'BL', are now lost in the mists of time.

12
He 111H-5 '1G+EK' of 2./KG 27 'Boelcke', Tours, February 1941
No time for such frivolities as personal markings now. The night *Blitz* is at its height and 2. *Staffel's* 'EK' wears the obligatory coat of black distemper in the hope that this will enable it to escape the attentions of both searchlights and nightfighters alike.

13
He 111P '2F+IN' of 5./KG 28, Seerappen, September 1939
KG 28 has been called the Luftwaffe's 'forgotten *Kampfgeschwader*', due in part no doubt to the confusing number of redesignations (even by Luftwaffe standards!) that it underwent during its short operational career. The first II./KG 28, for example, existed for just seven months, being formed from II./KG 254 in May 1939 before then returning to the *'Totenkopf'* fold again (this time as II./KG 54) in December of the same year. During that time its 5. *Staffel* served briefly in Poland, where each machine was decorated with an animal motif corresponding to the aircraft's individual letter. This is *'I-Igel'* (Hedgehog) – other examples were *'F-Fuchs'* (Fox), *'G-Giraffe'* and *'K-Katze'* (Cat).

14
He 111H '1T+AL' of 3./KG 28, Brest-Morlaix, January 1941
While the first II./KG 28 had been formed from and then reincorporated back into II./KG 54 (see above), so the second I./KG 28 was likewise created out of III./KG 26 (via KGr.126) and then redesignated back again. During the first half of its 12-months existence – from January to June 1941 – this *Gruppe* carried out minelaying operations over and around the British Isles. Shown carrying LMB aerial mines, '1T+AL' is wearing an early version of the so-called 'permanent' night camouflage scheme, which was applied to the wing (and tail) leading edges and fuselage centre-section only.

15
He 111H-5 'V4+AK' of 8./KG 40, Brest, May 1941
Despite the somewhat rudimentary night camouflage, the 'V4' code of KG 1 is still clearly visible on this machine. Equally clear from the *Werk-Nummer* (4020) at the base of the tailfin, however, is that this is an aircraft from one of the H-5/H-6 production blocks, a variant that I./KG 1 did not begin to receive until the time of its

redesignation as III./KG 40 in March 1941. The *Gruppe* must presumably have retained its original codes for several weeks beyond that date before eventually adopting KG 40's official 'F8' designator. Note the two small ship silhouettes at the base of the rudder (evidence of the unit's anti-shipping role) and the rearward-firing machine gun in the tail cone.

16

He 111H '9K+HS' of 8./KG 51 'Edelweiss', Landsberg/Lech, May 1940

KG 51 flew the He 111 for only a relatively brief period, being the last *Geschwader* to convert to the type before the outbreak of war, and having fully re-equipped with Ju 88s by the time of the Battle of Britain. Note the high demarcation line between upper and lower camouflage surfaces, and the overly large 'last two' of the fuselage code (the latter a common practice on III. *Gruppe* aircraft).

17

He 111H 'A1+IH' of 1./KG 53 *'Legion Condor'*, Roth, May 1940

Also depicted during the Battle of France period similar to the machine immediately above, I./KG 53's 'A1+IH' likewise displays a high camouflage demarcation line together with a slight deviation from the norm in its 'last two'. In this instance the colour of the individual aircraft letter 'I' is white as laid down in regulations, but the outlining of the *Staffel* designator 'H' in white is very likely to have been a unit level embellishment.

18

He 111H-3 'A1+DA' of the *Geschwaderstab* KG 53 *'Legion Condor'*, Lille-Nord, August 1940

The white outlining of the last letter of the fuselage code – in this case the *Geschwaderstab* designator 'A' – is also evident on this machine pictured at the height of the Battle of Britain. Other points of note on this He 111 are the additional nose and ventral machine guns, the 'stepped' camouflage demarcation line fore and aft of the fuselage cross and the three white bars on the rudder (and upper right wing) that served as air-to-air recognition and formating aids.

19

He 111H 'A1+LL' of 3./KG 53 *'Legion Condor'*, Lille-Nord, December 1940

Night *Blitz* washable black distemper was seldom as crudely applied as this (the groundcrew were presumably either in a terrible hurry, or their hearts simply were not in the job!). Underneath the slapdash paintwork lurks 3. *Staffel's* 'LL' – possibly the same 'LL' that forced-landed in Norfolk and was fired by its crew in the early hours of 4 May 1941.

20

He 111P 'B3+LM' of 4./KG 54 *'Totenkopf'*, Varrelbusch, April 1940

Another *Geschwader* to convert from He 111s to Ju 88s prior to the Battle of Britain was KG 54. Pictured at the time of *'Weserübung'*, the bomber's obvious points of interest are the diagonal red line II. *Gruppe* identifier and the *'Totenkopf'* (Death's Head) *Geschwader* badge. But note too the name in small white script on the carburettor air intake atop the engine nacelle. 4. *Staffel* gave each of its machines a name corresponding to the aircraft's individual. This is 'B3+LM' *'Lümmel'* ('Hooligan'). Another recorded example was 'B3+JM' *'Jumbo'*.

21

He 111E '56+J12' of 2./KG 155 *'Greif'*, Langendiebach, January 1939

Back to the pre-war period with aircraft 'J' of the 'Griffon' *Geschwader's* 2. *Staffel*. The He 111 displays another textbook set of early camouflage and markings, but with the vertical tail surfaces finished in the latest Marking Regulation No 5 January 1939 style (see profile 6).

22

He 111P 'G1+AN' of 5./KG 55 *'Greif'*, Leipheim, May 1940

Proving once again the old adage that in the Luftwaffe 'the only hard and fast rule is that there *were* no hard and fast rules', the style of the fuselage codes on this 5./KG 55 machine is very definitely non-regulation – did the *Staffelkapitän* perhaps employ the services of a signwriter?

23

He 111P 'G1+KT' of 9./KG 55 *'Greif'*, Villacoublay, October 1940

Marking the transition from daylight Battle of Britain to night *Blitz*, this 9. *Staffel* aircraft has been fitted with additional defensive armament against attack by RAF day fighters, but has also had its undersides dappled in black distemper for night operations.

24

He 111P 'G1+FP' of 6./KG 55 *'Greif'*, Chartres, February 1941

Compared to the 9. *Staffel* machine immediately above, this visual pathfinder/*Beleuchter* (illuminator) of 6./KG 55 is in full night attire. Not only have the entire undersides and much of the fuselage been daubed black, all remaining uppersurfaces have also been liberally stippled with black distemper. Note that although the fuselage codes have been roughly toned down, the *Geschwader's 'Greif'* (Griffon) badge has been left untouched.

25

He 111B '2L+H31' of 7.(K)/LG 1, Greifswald, May 1937

Wearing a standard mid- to late-1930s three-tone upper camouflage scheme, this machine – individual letter 'H' – is believed to have been the eighth of the nine initial He 111Bs delivered to III.(K)/LG 1 in February 1937. The remaining four characters of its fuselage code, however, are at odds with the regulation bomber markings of the period (see profiles 6, 10 and 21). Firstly, the

Geschwader designator – the alpha-numeric '2L' shown here had replaced the unit's original '25', and it would remain in use until mid-1939. Secondly, the 'last two' varied from the norm in that they were in reverse order, the '31' here indicating the first *Staffel* of the third *Gruppe* – in other words, 7. *Staffel*!

26
He 111H 'L1+LN' of 5./LG 1, Hannover-Langenhagen, May 1940
In mid-1939 LG 1 replaced its '2L' *Geschwader* designator with 'L1', the code it would retain throughout World War 2. Here, it is worn by a machine of II. *Gruppe* at the start of the *Blitzkrieg* in the west, by which time LG 1 was already beginning to relinquish its He 111s for Ju 88s – the aircraft with which the unit is more commonly associated (see *Osprey Combat Aircraft 17 - Ju 88 Kampfgeschwader on the Western Front, Osprey Combat Aircraft 75 - Ju 88 Kampfgeschwader in North Africa and the Mediterranean* and *Osprey Combat Aircraft 79 - Ju 88 Kampfgeschwader on the Russian Front* for further details).

27
He 111H '6N+HK' of 2./KGr.100, Aalborg, April 1940
A typical *'Dreimaster'* ('Three-master') of the pathfinding KGr.100 in early wartime finish and markings, with a high demarcation line between the upper and lower camouflage surfaces and small (1940-pattern) fuselage cross. Note that the four-character fuselage code also appears in full across the lower wing surfaces, and that the individual aircraft letter 'H' is repeated above the swastika on the tailfin.

28
He 111H '6N+EL' of 3./KGr.100, Vannes-Meucon, March 1941
By the time of the night *Blitz* the Heinkel pathfinders of KGr.100 were all but anonymous beneath their extensive coats of black distemper. Only the small yellow 'E' applied to the top of the tailfin identifies this particular machine as 3. *Staffel's* '6N+EL'.

29
He 111H '1T+GK' of 2./KGr.126, Nantes, September 1940
Formed from III./KG 26 in April 1940, KGr.126 was involved primarily in minelaying operations during both the Battles of France and Britain – latterly mainly by night – before being officially redesignated as I./KG 28 in January 1941 (see profile 14).

30
He 111J 'M7+KL' of 3./Kü.Fl.Gr.806, Uetersen, December 1939
When first formed shortly after the outbreak of war (from elements of Kü.Fl.Gr.306 and 506), *Küstenfliegergruppe* 806 was equipped with He 111Js such as that depicted here. As befitted its naval background, the *Gruppe* was employed on maritime patrol and reconnaissance duties (2. and 3. *Staffeln* over the North Sea, 1. *Staffel* over the Baltic). By the time of the Battle of Britain it had re-equipped with Ju 88s and was operating as KGr.806.

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He 111 *KAMPFGESCHWADER* IN THE WEST

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